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Short Stories.

No. 740.] Week ending March 7, 1903. [Price One Penny.

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FIRST CHAPTER.

The Face at the Door.

"By Jove, what a lovely thing! Miss Davenal, you are a genius. Imagine your doing that all out of your own head!"

"Not quite all out of my own head, Sir Guy," was the laughing response; "I assure you it has taken up yards and yards of ribbon. I have never tried to do such a large piece before. I was afraid at first the design wasn't going to be bold enough."

The speaker stepped back to contemplate her unfinished task—a large, oblong panel of dead-leaf silk, stretched upon a light frame of laths and covered by the wandering green sprays and ruddy blossoms of the briar-rose, worked curiously in loosely-drawn ribbons of various shades and breadths. The frame itself stood near a hobbed firegrate in a little, plainly-furnished apartment, from whose wide, recessed, small-paned window, the fading beams of a March sun fell across an oil-clothed floor to illuminate the splendid panel which Moira Davenal was studying.

She herself was a figure befitting the unpretentiousness of the place. Tall—for a girl yet in the last of her teens—large and elastically moulded, her simple blouse and skirt were hidden by a big white apron with an old-fashioned "bib" and straps. Her features were fine and strongly marked, her expression shy yet resolute. Her hair, which was of a rare and true gold, inclining towards the warm tint of the ripe orange, was gathered in almost cumbersome masses low at her neck.

Her companion had been contemplating her no less intently than she had been regarding the panel of ribbon-work. He was a young man, with the smooth brown skin and proud, good-tempered profile of the well-bred Briton. His costume was the dark, smartly-cut tweed morning-dress, so dear to the heart of the country gentleman, and his riding-boots and hunting-crop showed that he had lately left the saddle.

"Nonsense!" he declared, "the result is perfect. I shall be positively ashamed to rob you of it."

Moira threaded her needle with a long strip of narrow green ribbon.

"Why should you feel like that?" she answered. "It has been done for you and you are—you are paying me for it, you know. Then I have enjoyed doing it very much indeed. That is even better than being paid. Besides, I am thinking of putting up over the door, 'Moira Davenal, Embroiderer in Ribbon to the Nobility and Gentry.' You are my first great client, Sir Guy. That might go over the door, too, 'By Appointment to Sir Guy Vanbrugh, The Close, Groudle, Cumberland.'"

Guy Vanbrugh looked out of the window. Beyond its trimly-curtained panes was a sleepy little harbour, a cobble-stoned quay, and the squat brown masts and cordage of a few coasters and fishing-luggers, shut in by a wave-worn breakwater. Over all was the grey sky, touched with the fitful sunshine of a quiet March day—a March that was apparently inclined to fulfil the proverb by going out like a lamb. At the gate of the garden which surrounded the house—half villa, half cottage—was fretting a glossy bay hunter, its reins looped to the latch of the wicket.

"You are laughing at me, Miss Davenal," Moira was told; "but there, I am quite defenceless. I only wish you would let me give you the panel for yourself and a piano to fasten it to."

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Moira Davenal glanced at him quickly. "I have a piano of my own, Sir Guy," she said, "but I don't keep it in here. In Groudle pianos belong to the best room, and most of them have holland covers on from one year's end to another. And as for the panel, I must do myself a copy of this, if you don't—or rather, if Miss Tarleton doesn't mind. I believe you said you wanted it for your cousin."

Her companion flushed—a flush almost boyish in its intensity—and played awkwardly with his whip.

"Miss Davenal," he rejoined, "you are very cruel. I suppose you mean that people are talking about—about Irene Tarleton and I being more to each other one of these days than cousins. Well, it's a confounded untruth. Irene and I are the best of friends, always have been, and I won't say our fathers didn't lay plans over the wine and walnuts. But Irene doesn't care for me in that way; and though she hasn't an idea, the sly little minx, I know whom she does like."

Moira had begun to work on a spray of leaves in a corner of the panel and her face was hidden.

"I—I beg your pardon, Sir Guy," she murmured. "I suppose it did seem as if I were hinting at what isn't my business."

Guy Vanbrugh came a step or two nearer. "Irene is a brick, though," he said, "and no end fond of beautiful things. That was why, when I dropped in that day to see your father about the yacht, and noticed you busy with some of that wonderful ribbon-stuff, I thought I'd get you to do me a piano-screen for her. It's her birthday soon, and I'm going to give her one of those pianos that play themselves. Extraordinary things they are, and getting to be quite the rage."

He was talking nervously, and for no better reason than the sake of saying something. Suddenly he bent over her.

"Moira," he added, "you didn't think I was only amusing myself, did you? You couldn't think that badly of me, surely."

The golden head bowed over the panel was raised haughtily.

"Sir Guy!" began Moira Davenal, "I—I——"

Guy Vanbrugh checked her with a gesture.

"Don't, dear," he said, "you are not angry, and you're not surprised. Women always guess these things, even before a man knows himself. Have I a chance to win you for my wife? I'll give you all the time you want to be sure, and, to be honest, I can't hear that I've any particular rival, though every bachelor in Groudle, by all accounts, is mad for you. Moira, have I the least little bit of a chance?"

Moira twisted the ribbon in her fingers. "I—I don't know, Sir Guy," she faltered, "I never thought about you seriously. And they would all say I married you for your money!"

Guy Vanbrugh laughed, a deep, masculine laugh, with a gasp in it not unlike a sob.

"Then there is a chance for me," he said, biting his lip. "Moira, I——"

He stopped abruptly. The ribbon fell from Moira's grasp and she looked up into his face. Its mask of well-bred composure had been lifted and she saw how profoundly he was moved. Something seemed to sting her own heart, and she put out her hands in a spasm of sympathy and protest.

"Please," she begged, "don't look like that. I'm not worth it—no woman is."

Guy Vanbrugh took her soft palm in his. "Moira," he said, "here have I been learning to love you better than anything else in the world, and you have been telling yourself all the while that I was only amusing myself. Perhaps you were wise, but all the same you were wrong. Listen, I am going to London for a few days—I must, on business. I called in to ask you to explain to your father. When I come back you shall let me know if you have missed me just a trifle. Don't allow your kind heart to pity me over-much, I don't want to be pitied, Moira, I want to be——"

He started back. There was a heavy step in the square hallway of the cottage, and a burly, almost gigantic figure, moving with a slow, short stride, entered the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Davenal," remarked Guy Vanbrugh easily, picking up the whip he had laid down, "I was just about leaving you a message. I must run up to London for a week-end. How goes on the task of raising the *Sylph*?"

The new-comer rubbed his deep, clean-shaven chin with a finger and thumb.

"I've found the last hole, Sir Guy," he answered, "under the port bow. The keel-plates have parted and the water can pour in faster than any pumps those London men were using could get it out. But I'll have her afloat now before long."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Guy Vanbrugh. "I only wish I'd called you in at first, Davenal, it would have saved time and money."

The diver smiled—a broad, pleasant smile. He was a huge man, whose breadth of limb and chest disguised his height, and he had the placid grey eyes of a child.

"It's very kind of you to say that, Sir Guy," he responded, and I'm glad to be of use to you. But I wouldn't have gone down again, sir, for anyone but your father's son. I've made my little bit, and I'm getting on. I want to spend the evening of my life in idleness, and, if I may own it without cowardice, in safety."

He drew Moira into his arms as he passed her, and scanned her face with gentle attention.

"You're working too close, lass," he said, "yon roses are taking the roses out of your cheeks, I'm thinking."

"Oh, no, dad," cried Moira eagerly, "I'm sure it isn't that. Sir Guy told me not to tire myself over it, and I haven't. If I'd liked I could have finished it ever so long ago."

She blushed furiously—without any apparent reason—and glanced covertly at Sir Guy. He was viewing his hunter from the window.

"My horse is getting impatient," he observed. "Miss Davenal, I shall never forgive myself if you work too hard on my account. Good afternoon, Davenal. You have my authority to put the panel in the fire if your daughter devotes to it more than half an hour a day. I shall only be in town for the week-end, so you can let me know its fate when I return."

He touched Moira's fingers, their eyes met, and Moira cast hers down. Then he shook hands with John Davenal, and, leaving the cottage, sprang into the saddle. Moira drew back the curtain and gazed after him as he rode away.

"That's a fine young fellow," said John Davenal, sitting down heavily by the fire, "but I wish his yacht was safely afloat again and my last dive yonder made—I'm not so fit for it as I was."

Moira turned quickly. "Are you unwell, dad?" she asked anxiously.

The diver put his head into his big palms. "It's my ears, lass," he rejoined; "first it's one and then the other. To-day it's the right side, and I'm fair moidered with the pain."

"Poor dad!" exclaimed Moira tenderly, and dropping the curtain, she crossed the kitchen towards him.

She paused half-way. A loud knock had sounded on the cottage door. Without ceremony it was thrust wide, and a man's form appeared in the entrance. He was below the medium stature, yet conspicuously broad-shouldered and athletic. His hair and bristling moustache were of a fairness almost ashen, and showed oddly upon a countenance tanned and bloated, and jowled like that of a bull-dog. A reefer suit of worn blue serge, and a peaked cap of the naval type, suggested the sailor, but his trousers lacked the chara

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teristic "flare" over the boot-top. And yet there was about him an unmistakable flavour of salt water.

Unsteadily yet familiarly he thrust into the small apartment. And as he reeled inwards he sang, in a loud, husky whisper, interrupted by hiccoughs, a scrap of a chorus:

"*Give my love to Nancy, the girl that I adore,*
Tell her that she'll never see her—her sailor any more."

The singer stopped and stared round inquiringly. "I want to see Davenal," he said thickly, "John Davenal—honest John. Lives here, doesn't he? Let him know Hartigan wants a word with him—Dennis Hartigan, that was chief steward of the *Athabasca*. He'll remember me; good reason to. Say I want to see the girl—not Nancy, the—the other girl."

The diver rose to his feet, strode to the intruder's side, and grasped his elbow.

"Hullo, Hartigan!" he remarked loudly, "who'd have expected you to turn up in Groudle? Glad to see you, though, glad to see you! Sit down and make yourself comfortable, I'll be with you in a moment."

He pushed the maritime-looking figure towards the fireplace and forced it into his own chair. Seeming merely to pilot its unsteady steps, he was, in reality, controlling it as if it had been a puppet.

"Moira," he added, "go and get me a drop of almond oil from the chemist's, there's a good lass. Tell him it's for me, and ask him to put a suspicion of laudanum in it."

The other caught at his coat-sleeve.

"Look here," he said, "you let me doctor you, John. Oh, I may be a bit muzzy, but I'm not drunk, and if you've got the ear-ache I can cure you in a twinkling. I've a famous pre—prescription—hang the word! Don't you worry about laudanum, let her bring me a spoonful of chloro—chlorodyne. No, dash it, that's not the stuff, it's chloro—chloroform. Fetch me a thimbleful of that and I'll have you better in a jiffy!"

Moira hesitated. The diver motioned to her.

"Humour him, Moira," he said, in a rapid aside, "bring both."

His visitor plucked him by the sleeve again.

"So that's Moira!" he exclaimed. "Come out of the daylight, John, and let me have a squint at her."

With a muttered anathema the diver yielded, and the bloated visage of Mr. Dennis Hartigan was thrust towards Moira Davenal's fair, disdainful face.

"Humph!" he growled at length; "I never was fond of your blooming blondes. Be off, my girl, and bring me what I've told you, or I'll send you back for it."

Moira shrugged her shoulders, took up a woollen tam-o-shanter from a corner table, put it on, ran a pin through it, and went out.

Left alone with his visitor, the diver clapped his hand on the nape of the other's neck. He bent as a reed bends to the wind.

"Now," said John Davenal, "what do you want? Not the girl—not Moira?"

Dennis Hartigan looked wise. "And if I do?" he demanded evasively. The diver set his jaw, and his pleasant countenance grew fierce and bull-like.

"You shan't have her!" was his passionate response. "Neither of you have sought her for more years than there are fingers on my hands. She's my child by nurture and affection, she loves me as if I were her father—she thinks I am her father."

"It's a clever child," commented the steward with a grin, "that *knows* its own father."

John Davenal brushed his coarse black hair off his forehead.

"Let us get to the point," he pursued. "Moira won't be away long. I'm going to make you an offer, Dennis Hartigan, and it is this: While you keep from Moira the fact that I am not her father, while you allow her to remain here peaceably with me, I will pay you fifty pounds a year. I'm not over rich—though I have lasted better at my profession than most—but I can manage that much. Let her go on calling me father; she is nothing to you, and she is everything to me."

Dennis Hartigan chuckled. "Fifty pounds a year," he said, "well, if it's worth it to you, it's worth it to me. Give me a tenner on account and I'm mum."

John Davenal sprang to a neighbouring shelf, took down a brass-bound travelling desk, and unlocked it hastily. Big man as he was, he was trembling with a feverish excitement.

The steward sat back in the wooden armchair, crossed his legs, and began to sing his drunken chorus—

"*Give my love to Nancy, the girl that I adore,*
Tell her that she'll never see her sailor any more.
Say I——"

He halted abruptly, and with such a curious gurgle in his voice that John Davenal looked round from the gold pieces he himself had begun to count. The steward was staring at the further door of the kitchen. It had opened stealthily, and in the aperture between the door and jamb was a woman's face, pale, and with the limpid, expressionless eyes of the blind.

Her features were set in a gaze of profound attention, it seemed as if her very soul were listening.

SECOND CHAPTER.

The Ears of the Blind

As though paralysed by a kind of fright, the steward sat, his gaze fixed upon the face in the doorway. It was that of a young woman, but its look of tremulous simplicity was unmistakably girlish. Pale as it was at the moment, it had a fragile, appealing prettiness, increased by the loose brown hair that waved naturally over the low, white forehead. The slowly opening door revealed a slight form, diminutive even for the weaker sex.

Dennis Hartigan roused, and with an expletive and a burst of laughter smote a clenched first upon the table by him.

"Well, I'm—blessed!" he cried; "it's Kit, and I took her for a blooming ghost. I didn't remember, at the minute, that she was living with you. Come in, Kit, and speak to your long-lost brother. When I saw you last, you were in curls and pinafores, now I suppose you are 'Miss Kate Hartigan.' Not so much of the 'Kit,' eh?"

His voice had grown suddenly firm and strong, though it was still harsh and unpleasant. The shock of his drunken misapprehension had completely sobered him.

John Davenal shut his desk and went towards the door. As he passed the steward he dropped into the latter's palm a rouleau of sovereigns, and laid his own finger on his lip. The blind girl was still lingering at the threshold of the apartment. The diver went and drew her in. Beside his gigantic bulk she seemed more frail and diminutive than ever.

"It's all right, Kit," he said kindly, "your brother Dennis is home again. You had almost forgotten that you had a brother, I'll be bound."

Kate Hartigan entered, it seemed, reluctantly. "There's someone else, isn't there?" she murmured, "someone I heard that night on the breakwater all those years ago—someone who was singing."

Dennis Hartigan was thrusting the gold into his pocket. He arrested the motion abruptly, and shot a startled glance at the speaker.

"Dennis was humming a bit of a tune," responded John Davenal, puzzled; "but no one is here excepting we three."

Kate Hartigan's face changed, and she sprang, with the singular self-confidence of the blind, to the side of the sailor.

"Dennis!" she cried.

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"And is it really you! Oh, my brother, my dear, dear brother!"

She threw her arms round the steward, and hung upon him, sobbing. John Davenal blew his nose violently. Dennis Hartigan coughed.

"That's all right, Kit," he said awkwardly; "I—I thought you'd be glad to see me."

"Glad!" exclaimed the blind girl, brokenly. "Oh, Dennis, why couldn't you have come before mother died? She wanted you so badly, as badly as I have wanted you since."

The other frowned irritably. "A man's got his living to make, my girl," he answered, "and in my trade you must take a job where you can find it. I've known men to be ten years working their way home from boat to boat. But wasn't I going to do something for your ear-ache, John?" he broke off, evasively.

The door from the garden swung inward as he uttered the question, and Moira appeared. Dennis Hartigan surveyed her with a new and critical interest, the passing of his temporary inebriation had left him a different man. Smart and well set-up though he was, it was not probable that he was under forty. His eyes were hard, bullying and cruel, his sun-burnt visage coarse and vaguely evil.

"Got that stuff, my lass?" he queried curtly, for Moira had not condescended to favour him with a single glance.

"No," she said, taking off her coquettish head-gear, "the man wouldn't sell it to me. I'm not twenty-one, and it's a poison."

Dennis Hartigan swore under his breath. "Easy seeing I'm not in London," he commented, "but I'll go myself and get some—hanged if I won't, and tell him what I think of him."

The diver would have protested, but his volunteer physician was determined.

"Kit can put her hat on," he said, with the air of one who utters an afterthought, "and take me to the shop. She used to know her way about this hole as a baby, so I suppose she does still. I'll have to be off soon, anyhow, and I expect she won't mind a stroll with her long-lost relation."

The blind girl darted out of the room and came back with a hat. Her face was glowing with pleasure and interest. John Davenal looked from her flushed, innocent countenance to the repellant one of her brother, and sighed as he threw the house-door wide for them.

Dennis Hartigan took his sister's arm, and they walked off together. Led unfalteringly by his sightless companion, the steward picked his way across the irregular cobblestones of the quay that skirted the harbour. His sister trod them with an elastic step, she was used to the clumsy species of paving. The sun was sinking in the fast-clouding West, a cold wind blew against them, lights began to twinkle along the shores of the bay, and in the windows of the little town.

"How strange," said the blind girl, "to be walking here with you, the last person in the world that really belongs to me! Mr. Davenal has been, oh, so good, and Moira is like my own flesh and blood. But I've always wanted my brother back, Dennis, I am very glad you have come home."

Kate Hartigan's cheeks were flushed, and her sensitive mouth trembled. But the heavy features of her lounging escort had set in a fierce scowl, and his brows were contracted and drawn down over the root of his thick nose.

"You didn't seem that pleased at first," he growled. "What did you mean by 'all those years ago,' and 'that night on the breakwater'?"

His sister winced at his tone. "There, I've vexed you!" she said; "don't be angry with me, Dennis, it was only your voice, in that scrap of a song you were singing. I have never really heard your voice before, to remember—I was a tiny thing when you went away—but when I heard it just now, both it and the song were quite familiar."

She guided him round the corner into a more central street and went along it.

"Years and years ago," she continued, "I could only have been about eight at the time, I was on the old breakwater one night. I liked to go all alone and sit down far on the landing-steps and listen to the tide flowing, and dream about where it came from, and what it had been doing during the day. And often I stopped out quite late—I think I used to forget all about time in my dreams."

"Yes, yes!" interrupted her brother, impatiently; "but you said something about one night."

Kate Hartigan assented. "One night," she pursued, "I was sitting there, under the bluff that overhangs the landing-steps, when I heard a voice—a man's voice, singing quite low, in a sort of whisper, and he was singing just what you were when I opened the kitchen door. I have always remembered the words—

"'*Give my love to Nancy, the girl that I adore,*
Tell her that she'll never see her sailor any more.'

"And the rest was about the Union Jack and fighting with a black. Then he said, to someone who was with him, I suppose, 'This is far out enough, in with it.' And then there was a kind of grinding of feet on the stones above, and a splash just in front of me."

The steward had clenched his fists, and his yellow teeth showed viciously under his grizzled moustache.

"A rum thing, I daresay," he answered sulkily, "but the song was quite popular once, and any amount of people must know it. I always sing it when I get a trifle muzzy. Odd, perhaps, but I do."

"Muzzy?" repeated his sister, bewildered; "what is that?"

"Drunk," explained her brother harshly, "not that I was exactly drunk just now. But I had a drop and felt like tuning up. At least, I did till I saw your white face in the doorway. It was so like a ghost's, it fairly sobered me."

The blind girl sighed. "I'm sorry I startled you," she replied gently, "but I wish you hadn't been what you call muzzy, Dennis dear. It may have been that which made your voice sound so like the man's on the breakwater, as if he had been 'muzzy' too. Yours sounds quite different now."

Dennis Hartigan's jaw set and his hands clenched involuntarily.

"Maybe," he said drily. "Aren't we ever coming to this chemist?"

"It's at the next corner," answered his sister, and the steward quickened his pace. Another moment and they had entered a small shop, whose illuminated green and crimson window-flasks showed its tenant's profession. Dennis Hartigan strolled up to the counter; a little, bald-headed, snowy-bearded man confronted him.

"I want some chloroform," he said, "and as you don't seem inclined to trust a woman with it, I've come myself."

The chemist smiled and rubbed his withered palms together. "Ah," he observed, "so you are the gentleman whose messenger Miss Davenal was. You see the young lady is not of legal age to sign the poison register, and chloroform is, as you will know, a poison of a peculiarly dangerous sort."

His customer sneered. "I have bought it on the nod in more countries than one," he said; "however, where is this bally register? Sixpennyworth of the stuff will do me—less if you like."

He took up the offered volume and the pen and scrawled his signature in the prescribed space. The chemist served him with the drug; he ordered, as a supplementary item, a small quantity of cotton-wool, paid for his purchases, pocketed them, and stepped out of the shop with a gruff 'Good evening.'"

This time it was his sister who took his arm. "You're not vexed with me really, Dennis, are you?" she said. Dennis Hartigan gnawed his moustaches.

"Why should I be?" he queried. "When you were a lass of eight I was alternately roasting and freezing on a Chinese cargo-boat. What has your man with a voice like mine to do with me? After all, I'll bet he was only drowning a sick dog or a batch of kittens."

"I know," said the blind girl humbly, "but you can't believe, Dennis, what a strange impression it left on my childish mind. For years after that I used to dream that I heard the voice singing over and over again:

"'*Tell her that she'll never see her sailor any more.*'

with a sort of stop before 'sailor,' just as you sang it to-night. And my dream always turned to you, because you were a sailor, or practically a sailor, and I was afraid I might never see you again. Then in my dream, I would hear someone say, 'Over with it!' and a splash would come, and I would wake up shuddering. But I never mentioned it to anyone, for fear they would laugh at me."

Her brother's grim countenance grew less perturbed. "That's a good, sensible sister," he said; "you take my advice and forget all about it. And now let's hurry back, or Davenal will fancy we've lost the road between us."

His guide quickened her pace, and they regained the house near the quay without either making further reference to the subject which had so singularly occupied their attention. On the way, Dennis Hartigan had paused to add a third item to his list of purchases—a common white clay tobacco-pipe.

As they entered the steward saw that Moira had lighted the lamp and that John Davenal was seated by the fire in his wooden arm-chair. Moira, leaning over the back, was placing a little chintz-covered cushion behind the diver's head. His large, soft, somewhat pained grey eyes were raised to contemplate her, and one of his huge brown palms caressed a little hand that had rested for a moment on his shoulder.

The watcher grinned. "I believe the old fool worships the ground she walks on," he muttered. "Might be his own flesh and blood—thinks she is, more or less. If—if he only knew!"

He stepped into the kitchen, with a sudden assumption of cheerfulness. "Here we are," he said, "now we shan't be long. It's as easy as lying, when you've once been shown."

He laid down upon the table the bottle of chloroform, the cotton wool, and the tobacco-pipe. Moira and the diver watched interestedly; the blind girl, who had gone through to take off her hat, returned to listen.

The steward plucked away a scrap of the cotton-wool, poured a few drops of the chloroform upon it, thrust it into the bowl of the pipe, and clapped his hand over the latter.

"Looks like magic, doesn't it?" he observed; "a Yankee sailor showed me the dodge. He picked it up from an old soldier who had been a hospital orderly in his time, and who cured him as I am going to cure you. Lend us the loan of your ear, John."

The diver inclined his head to bring the aperture of the organ in question into the light of the lamp. Dennis Hartigan bent down, inserted the stem of the pipe, put his mouth to the opening of the bowl, and breathed steadily, driving the chloroform vapour into the recesses of the ear. From time to time he watched his patient's face.

"A thousand will do me at present, my Lady."

The lines of the pain began to die out of John Davenal's features, and the involuntary smile that betokens relief from long-continued suffering, stole over them. He sighed lustily.

"That's better already," he exclaimed; "much better! Dennis, you're a famous doctor."

Dennis Hartigan withdrew his impromptu instrument and put it down.

"Not a bad notion, is it?" he said, "sort of sends the ear to sleep and gives it a chance to get good-tempered again."

He stood up and resettled his collar and tie. They had been disarranged by his stooping. As he did so his glance fell upon the dial of the clock on the mantel. The fingers were close upon the hour of five.

"By Jingo!" he ejaculated, "is that the time? And I've got to get back to Glasgow for the balance of my pay. I'll have to take myself off. Never mind, I'll be back again in a day or two. A look round among old parts and old pals won't do me any harm, and I'm not sure what I'm going to turn to next."

The blind girl stole to him and put her hands on his arm. "You'll stay a while when you come back, Dennis," she asked; "won't you—for my sake? Nobody else has as much right to you as I have, nobody could have—unless it was a wife or a sweetheart."

There was a ring of curiosity in her pleading tone, and again the keen "listening" look came into her face.

Her brother shot a quick glance at her. The glance passed towards the diver. John Davenal met it gravely, and without any audible observation. The steward's pause had been almost imperceptible.

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"Well, luckily for both of us, Kit," he said, "I've got neither to think about at present, so perhaps I'll put in a few days at Groudle, but just now it must be 'quick march.' So long, Davenal; bye-bye, Kit."

The blind girl clasped his hands and offered her cheek for a kiss. The steward hesitated and something like a blush tinged his sunburnt, bloated visage. But he laughed awkwardly, brushing his sister's face with his moustache. Moira shrank behind the driver, as if fearful lest the same salute might be her fate.

But Dennis Hartigan contented himself with a brusque nod and a touch of her unwilling fingers, and, with a renewed "So long" to John Davenal, departed in the windy dusk.

His sister followed him to the gate and stood listening to his retreating footsteps. Her face was aglow with a new-sprung happiness and affection.

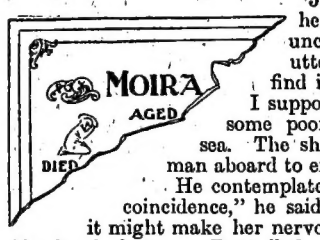
In the cottage John Davenal was putting on his slippers.

"Yon stuff's done me a power of good, Moira," he said. "I believe I could do with some tea. While you are making it I'll go and have a wash."

Passing through into the rear of the small house, he lit a candle and set a tap running over a stone sink. As he took off his coat something bulky in one of the deep pockets struck against his knee.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, "to think of my forgetting that."

He thrust a finger and thumb into the pocket and drew out an irregular piece of damp and rotten wood. To it was attached the torn and jagged fragment of a thin metal-plate engraved. Some words were still decipherable upon it. The plate had evidently been a square and the fragment which he had was a rough diagonal half.



John Davenal shook his head over it. "That's a queer, uncanny kind of thing," he uttered aloud, "for me to find in ten fathoms of salt water. I suppose it's part of the coffin of some poor soul who was buried at sea. The ship must have had a handy man aboard to engrave that."

He contemplated it doubtfully. "An odd coincidence," he said. "I'll not let her see it—it might make her nervous. Some folks would consider it a bad omen. But, all the same, I'll keep it—yes, I'll keep it."

THIRD CHAPTER.

Mistress and Maid.

"Preposterous, Davenal, perfectly preposterous. I have been more than generous to you all these years, to say nothing of the sums which, from time to time, on one pretext or another, you have obtained from me. You should have saved a considerable amount, and I cannot consent to any further exactions."

"I'm sorry for that, my lady," was the quiet response, and a pair of spare, slightly-yellowed hands fluttered about the haughty grey head of the woman who had previously spoken. She was lounging in a comfortable chair before her triple-mirrored toilet-table, languidly submitting to the manipulations of her maid. A portly, well-preserved personage of the dowager type, selfishness was stamped upon her as with a seal.

"What you can possibly want with the money," she exclaimed, plucking at the laced sleeve of her dressing jacket, "I am at a loss to tell. A thousand pounds—it is simply black——"

She checked herself. The maid went on with her operations. She was a compactly-built, hard-featured woman of forty, with heavy brows and pinched, secretive lips.

"Blackmail, you would say, my lady," she observed, in a self-possessed undertone—"I wouldn't use such words, my lady, they might be overheard, and—and misunderstood. You see my—a certain person is—who is a ship's steward, my lady, is leaving the sea soon and we had thought of taking a country public-house together. That was why I ventured to represent to your ladyship my long services and fidelity to your—your ladyship's interests."

Lady Tarleton twisted a worn wedding-ring upon her hand.

"You are distressingly clever, Davenal," she retorted, "but I'm tired of being bled. Had I been wise, I should never have allowed you to play the leech with me. Your veiled threats are futile—to injure me would only be to injure yourself."

"So you've often said, my lady," answered Hannah Davenal, "and yet you have, as you remarked, been more than generous. You could not forget that there is a difference between the rope and the broad arrow. Your portion would have been worse than mine."

Her mistress shuddered. Hannah Davenal laid down the silver-backed tortoise-shell comb she had been using.

"However, my lady," she said, "I will be generous too, if only for my own purposes. You are weaker in mind than I, and you are growing old. I will tell you a secret you may be glad to have learnt some day, whatever you may be now. It is this, you think yourself worse than you are. For nearly twenty years you have believed that there was blood on those white hands of yours. You have been wrong. Yet, for that very reason, your peril has been greater than you suspected."

Lady Tarleton stared at her maid. Surprise and alarm struggling in her face.

"For nearly twenty years," pursued Hannah Davenal, "I have had your and your daughter's future at my mercy. The bubble I helped you to blow I could have pricked—how completely you cannot guess—at any moment. And, when I think how you have grudged me the few pounds I have asked you for, I could find it in my heart to wish I had done it."

She looked at her mistress in the mirror—sternly, masterfully. Then she bent over her and whispered in her ear.

White as was the cambric that covered her withered shoulders, Lady Tarleton's cheeks grew whiter. Suddenly the scarlet flush of rising and desperate anger swept into them and she parted her lips to speak.

"It's a lie," she said hoarsely, "a clever lie! The thing was impossible, impossible!"

Hannah Davenal smiled. "I did it, my lady," she answered, "you can have proof. Go down to Groudle Tower and look."

Lady Tarleton studied her with a kind of helpless curiosity, mingled with impotent wrath. But a shadow had fallen upon her haughty countenance—a shadow of a great fear.

"And you did this—alone?" she said slowly. Her maid was opening the doors of a wardrobe.

"No, my lady," she replied, "I had help. My husband helped me."

Lady Tarleton knitted her brows.

"Your husband!" she rejoined, "what, you are married?"

"Yes, my lady," was the reply, "I was married twenty-two years ago. What gown will your ladyship wear?"

Her mistress gasped. "Twenty-two years!" she repeated. "And your husband—what of him?"

"He's a ship's steward, my lady," responded Hannah Davenal grimly, "and not a man to settle down kindly at home—at least, he wasn't when I married him. So, when I found out what he was by nature, I told him to stop at the sea till he really wanted a home and a wife. He took on then with the China trade. But he's working his way home now, and I'm feeling like settling down myself, my lady."

She broke off and turned to the wardrobe again. "The

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grey zibelline, I suppose, my lady?" she said. "Your ladyship will be driving to-day, and it's very cold."

Lady Tarleton had leant on the back of her chair, and was gazing into the fire beside her. "You can certainly keep your own secrets, Davenal," she remarked, "and you shall have money to settle down with this absurd husband of yours. But, really, you mustn't expect me to believe that preposterous story about—about——"

"As I said before, my lady," observed the maid, "it can easily be proved."

Her mistress laughed scornfully. "By your husband's testimony?" she said. Hannah Davenal brought the rough cloth walking-dress.

"No, my lady," she returned; "by your own eyes."

Lady Tarleton fell to gazing into the fire once more. "Why do you tell me this now?" she asked. Her maid slipped the skirt over her head.

"It suited me to wait, my lady," she confessed. "I was very comfortable in your service, and I thought I might get a bigger price—you'll pardon me speaking so frankly, my lady—if I put off showing my hand till you had come definitely into your rights, my lady. But time is getting on, and, as I explained, my lady, my husband is leaving the sea, so I ventured to——"

She brought the bodice of the dress, and held it for her mistress to don. Lady Tarleton met her with a full, searching gaze.

"Pack up a few things," she directed, brusquely, "I will go down to Groudle and investigate these—these amazing assertions of yours. After all, why don't you own that the whole thing is a clever fabrication, got up to fleece me of this particular thousand you have set your heart on. Come, confess, and you shall have not a thousand, but fifteen hundred."

"A thousand will do me, *at present*, my lady," was the significant reply. Lady Tarleton drew a sharp breath.

"Davenal!" she exclaimed. "Understand me——"

She was interrupted. A third person—an arch and youthful brunette—had burst tempestuously into the room.

"Mamma," she cried, "don't you want to see Guy for a minute? He is in town on a flying visit, and has called. He can't come again—he's going North to see about fishing up that yacht of his, and meanwhile he has got to buy a new dog-cart, give evidence in a Chancery suit, and attend a public dinner."

"My dear Irene," said her mother coldly, "I wish you wouldn't run upstairs and then gasp out long sentences. I shall be charmed to see Guy as soon as Davenal has finished dressing me. But you could just as well have sent up, and not broken off your *tête-à-tête* with him on my account. Whom do you suppose he called to see—me? Would to Heaven he had found you in anything but that hideous cycling costume!"

Irene Tarleton coloured, laughed, and made her exit from the room no less hastily than she had entered it. She was a robust young girl, in the quite definitely short-skirted dress to which Lady Tarleton had referred so disparagingly. Her mother's reference to "gasping" was certainly a libel, for though she came as near as a self-respecting young lady may to running down the stately flight of stairs that gained the hall of the great town house, her breathing did not seem to be in the least degree affected as she re-entered a dainty drawing-room, to find herself in the presence of Sir Guy Vanbrugh.

"Of course mamma wants to see you," she said, "you must stop just a moment more, even though it does bore you horribly."

Guy Vanbrugh shrugged his shoulders. "It won't if you'll stay and talk to me," he answered, "but aren't you going out on your wheel?"

"Just got back," rejoined his cousin. "You know I always did believe in early rising. Mamma says I am positively mannish in my energy. But, never mind me, Guy, are you really never coming back to town for more than week-ends? I wonder you don't leave the *Sylph* where she is and build a new yacht!"

"And present Neptune with another ten thousand pounds' worth of old iron?" ejaculated the other; "not I!"

"Are you quite sure," demanded Irene Tarleton casually, running her fingers over the keyboard of a neighbouring piano, "that there's no other attraction up North?"

Sir Guy Vanbrugh started. "Irene," he exclaimed, "you—you—oh, nonsense, you can't have been hearing any gossip!"

Irene clapped her hands. "My dear Guy," she said, "you *have* given yourself away finely. I only meant to chaff you, and I have stumbled on a secret. Tell me who she is, Guy? I won't be jealous, I promise you."

Her cousin hesitated. "Not yet, Irene," he answered. "I—it may not come to anything. I may not prove lucky."

"Of course you will," retorted Irene. "Oh, won't mamma be wild? She doesn't dream that we're not billing and cooing this precise moment. I am glad, though, dear old Guy! It's quite a load off my mind. Not that there ever was any real risk of your falling in love with me."

"Or you with me," added her cousin, cheerfully. "What a blessing we are such good chums, Irene! Haven't you any confidences to intrust to me?"

Irene slipped away. "Not for worlds!" she said. "And here's mamma."

An involuntary, if scarcely audible groan escaped from Guy Vanbrugh's lips. Lady Tarleton was indeed sweeping into the drawing-room. He turned to her politely.

"I'm so sorry to have called at this unconscionably early hour, aunt," he began. "But I wanted a glimpse of Irene and—and you, and I'm only in town for a brief while on business. I go back to Groudle to-morrow."

"And is there any actual probability of recovering your poor *Sylph*?" said Lady Tarleton absent-mindedly. She was eyeing shrewdly the faces of the two young people.

"We are practically sure of it by now," responded her nephew; "I have a very clever diver at work, a man named Davenal, a native of the place. He promises to float her in the course of a few days."

"Davenal!" repeated Irene. "He must be a relation of our Davenal, mamma, she comes from Groudle."

"Possibly," answered her mother, suppressing a little yawn of indifference, "well, I hope he proves successful, my dear Guy; yachting, especially in the *Sylph*, was always my passion, and, after a London winter, Irene could do with some sea air."

Irene burst into a peal of merriment. "Don't I look delicate, Guy?" she said. "Am I not fading away before your very eyes?"

Lady Tarleton frowned. "You are incorrigible, Irene," she commented testily. Guy Vanbrugh looked hastily at his watch and made his adieux. He dreaded a duel of words between the audacious Irene and her diplomatic, but irritable mother.

Lady Tarleton, for the nonce, spared her daughter a lecture. "Irene," she said, when the door had closed behind her nephew, "I'm going down into Cumberland to-night, upon matters of urgency connected with the estate. I shall be back in forty-eight hours or thereabouts. Do, for Heaven's sake, refrain from indulging your passion for the unconventional in my absence."

"Dear me," observed Irene, ignoring the latter portion of her mother's remarks; "how sudden, mamma! Why not have gone down with Guy to-morrow?"

"Impossible!" declared her mother. "I want to be at Groudle to-night. Davenal accompanies me, she is packing now. Go and take that hideous frock off and you can drive with me to the station."

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Irene made a reluctant mouth, but yielded.

It was noon when Lady Tarleton bade farewell to her daughter at the window of a first-class carriage. Hannah Davenal, with a luncheon-basket and a reserve of wraps, was in an adjoining third.

The sun was high over the glass span of the express departure-platform at Euston when the train drew out of the terminus, evening had long fallen before it steamed into Carlisle. The maid superintended the transference of her mistress and the latter's belongings to a coach on the small, coast-wise railway that runs from the old Northern city southwards. She had telegraphed from town, and a closed victoria met them at the local station which was their ultimate destination.

Hannah Davenal entered the vehicle with her mistress, but neither spoke. Lady Tarleton was absorbed in a gloomy reverie. The night had proved moonless and windy, and they seemed, as they were driven across the broken, upland country of West Cumberland, to be plunging into a black void of space.

At length the victoria stopped. It had penetrated into the square courtyard of a gaunt, baronial residence, with a huge and ruinous keep at one corner. They had reached Groudle Tower.

A stolid servant or two waited upon them, under the superintendence of an ancient housekeeper. Lady Tarleton supped in irritable solitude, and retired at once. Hannah Davenal imitated her example. The household at Groudle Tower gossiped for a while, and then also sought slumber.

One hour, two hours, chimed from the church in the distant valley, and then Lady Tarleton's door opened silently, and Hannah Davenal emerged. Lady Tarleton followed her. Both women were cloaked and muffled.

In the great hall below, Hannah Davenal turned sharply to the right. "This way, my lady," she whispered, "to the old justice-room."

Lady Tarleton bent her head. Her face was set, and her eyes sparkled under her hooded wrap.

The justice-room was a vast and wainscotted apartment, heavy with long disuse and the winter cold. Hannah Davenal struck a match and went towards a panelled cupboard with an upright, sliding front. She pushed up the latter, and showed a row of large keys, each with its wooden tab and dingy string.

"Most of them are useless now," she said, "but the key we want has always hung here. Eighteen years ago I took it down and used it, as we are going to use it now."

Lady Tarleton drew a sharp breath in the silence, but her maid either did not hear or did not heed the action.

"We can get out by one of these windows," she went on; "they are quite low, and open into the courtyard."

She blew out the match as she spoke, stepped across, and thrust up a heavy sash, then gave her hand to her mistress. Lady Tarleton climbed over the sill into the fresh and windy darkness. Hannah Davenal glided after her. The window closed gently, and the justice-room, vacant once more, was left to its wonted quiet.

A century-old clock in the hall, with a monster pendulum that sounded in the justice-room like a muffled minute-gun, ticked away half an hour. Then the window of the ancient apartment reopened, and Hannah Davenal, stepping in, turned to assist her mistress.

Lady Tarleton was white and thoughtful. But a quiet, almost surreptitious, smile hovered upon the lips of Hannah Davenal.

FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Call in the Dawn.

"Not so fast, darling, not so fast, the best thing round a neat waist is a sailor's arm, and if I'm not exactly what you would call a sailor, I'm the next thing to it. Here's your health and a handsome sweetheart to you."

Dennis Hartigan lifted a brimming pewter to his lips. He had taken it from the hands of a strapping country lass who had served him with it as he sat on a bench before a wayside public-house. His free arm forcibly incircled her, and his bloated, bold face stared up into her own. Over him, as he sat, hung a creaking sign, lettered "The Half Brick."

Past the little inn ran a lonely country road, turning sharply just before it reached the inn. The air of the afternoon had a touch of spring in it, and a streak of sunshine gilded the lattices and forecourt of the public-house. Further off, across a sloping hillside and sweep of ploughed land, it laid a shining wake upon the placid waters of the Irish sea.

"He'll have to be a better-looking fellow than you, if he's to have any luck with me," said the Phyllis of "The Half Brick," struggling to release herself; "let me go."

The steward chuckled loudly. "Not without a kiss, my lass," he replied. "Come, I was born and bred in these parts, and I'm a sort of a countryman of yours. You've a pair of pretty, pouting lips, let's see if they taste as good as they look."

The girl gave a little scream as he drew her face down to his. But a spare, black-gloved hand was laid on her shoulder, and she was twisted violently round. A tall, hard-featured, plainly-dressed woman was confronting her. It was Hannah Davenal, and the jaw of the steward dropped, leaving his mouth opened in a ludicrous gasp, like an inaudible exclamation.

Hannah Davenal swung the serving-maid aside.

"Hussy!" she said, and motioned to the discomfited Lothario.

"Pay for what you've had," she observed, quietly yet authoritatively, "and come along with me. This is the way you pass your time, is it? I suspected as much, not being a natural-born fool."

The steward threw down a couple of coppers on the ale bench, dragged his peaked cap over his eyes, and stalked off. The serving-maid put her hands on her hips and burst into shrill laughter; it echoed down the road after Dennis Hartigan and his companion. The latter's brows were knit, and a couple of small, even teeth showed where they rested on her lower lip.

"You're a beauty," she said at length; "you wrote me that you were in Glasgow, hanging about and waiting for some disputed pay. Now I find you in Groudle, flirting with a barmaid. What are you doing here?"

Dennis Hartigan began to fill a worn briar pipe.

"No harm in spending a day or two in the old place, is there, Nan," he asked, conciliatorily. "I ran over to see—to see Kit, and she took such a fancy to her long-lost brother that I promised to come to Groudle again before going south. And as for the kiss you interrupted, what's an odd kiss or so to a seafaring man?"

Hannah Davenal sneered. "Nothing," she said, "to him. But if he happens to have a wife like me, Dennis, he'd better not be too free with them before her."

Her husband grinned. "How did I know you were anywhere near?" he demanded. "I took you to be in London with that old cat Lady T." He struck a match and lit his pipe. "I've been expecting to hear from you, though," he added, "about money. I wrote you a week ago saying that I was hard up."

The lady's-maid stood still in the road. "Money, money, money!" she exclaimed; "it's all you ever write about. You'll get no more, in driblets. I am going to leave Lady T. and get a roof of my own over me. I mean that you shall share it and behave yourself with a show of decency towards me, your lawful wife. And you'll do it if you've sense enough to tell which side your bread's buttered on."

Dennis Hartigan bit at his pipe-stem. "Don't bully me, Nan, old girl, it won't do," he said slowly. "I know too much. You and I are in the same boat, and'll have to stop there. I say," he continued, interrupting himself, "the

kid's grown into a tidy bit of goods, isn't she. I don't like golden hair myself, but she'd be worth a lot in the ballet."

His wife clenched her powerful, nervous hands. "You fool!" she cried; "I'll be sworn you've been meddling. Why did you ever come back here? Can't you let well alone? Was it for nothing that I have shunned my brother's house like the plague all these years? Do you think I hadn't a reason for it? You great clown! Get out of Groudle and stay out of it. You couldn't have turned up here at a worse moment."

She had turned upon him with such a passion of scorn and resentment that her husband quailed.

"I've done no harm," he said; "I've not breathed a word but 'Good-day' and 'Good evening' to the girl. What the dickens are you carrying on about?"

Hannah Davenal calmed herself with an effort. "I've no time to waste on you," she retorted. "I've other fish to fry. If you want to see me again before getting out of Groudle you'll have to come up to the Tower to-night, Lady T.'s off to London in the morning. You remember the old place, the window of the justice-room. Be there at twelve, and I'll come down to you. For the present leave me to go about my own business."

Without further parley she strode into a narrow lane that led slopingly from the high road to the placid, steel-grey ocean and the lower levels of the little seaport.

Dennis Hartigan swore as he looked after the retreating, deliberate figure.

"Curse you for a cold, proud, covetous jade!" he said; "it's a lass with a bright eye and a trim ankle I want for a wife and not to be tied to your sour-faced bag of bones."

Unconscious of this bitter epitome of her personal appearance, the lady's-maid pursued her way with a steady, unvarying gait. When she stopped she had descended to the cobblestone quay, reached the door of the diver's cottage, and knocked imperiously.

John Davenal himself answered the summons. His broad, kindly face wrinkled at the sight of his visitor.

"Come in, Hannah, come in!" he said, stepping back. "I'm glad to see you. It's many a long day since you crossed my threshold."

His sister entered austerely, and glanced about her.

"It was better so," she answered; "are you alone?"

"Moira is out," said her brother, "with Kit. Won't you sit down?"

Hannah Davenal remained standing. "I'm not one to beat about the bush," she intimated abruptly; "and you're wondering what I've come for."

"I—I was," admitted the diver, falteringly; "but you'll sit down, Hannah, surely."

His visitor rejected the proposal with an impatient gesture.

"You're right," she said, studying his perturbed countenance, "I've come for Moira. She mustn't stay in Groudle any longer."

The diver reeled as if he had received a blow. Then he steadied himself.

"I don't want to be unbrotherly, Hannah," he responded, "nor to set the will of a husband against a wife. But—but Dennis—approached me on this matter a day or two ago, and I agreed with him that, on certain terms, Moira was to remain with me and continue, as at present, to believe herself my daughter."

Hannah Davenal ground her teeth. "The fool!" she said, "the fool! But what proof have you of this? Some absurd document or other?"

"No," confessed John Davenal, hesitatingly; "but his word, as man to man. And—and money was paid, Hannah, and the bargain bound."

His sister stamped her foot and muttered an imprecation on the absent Dennis.

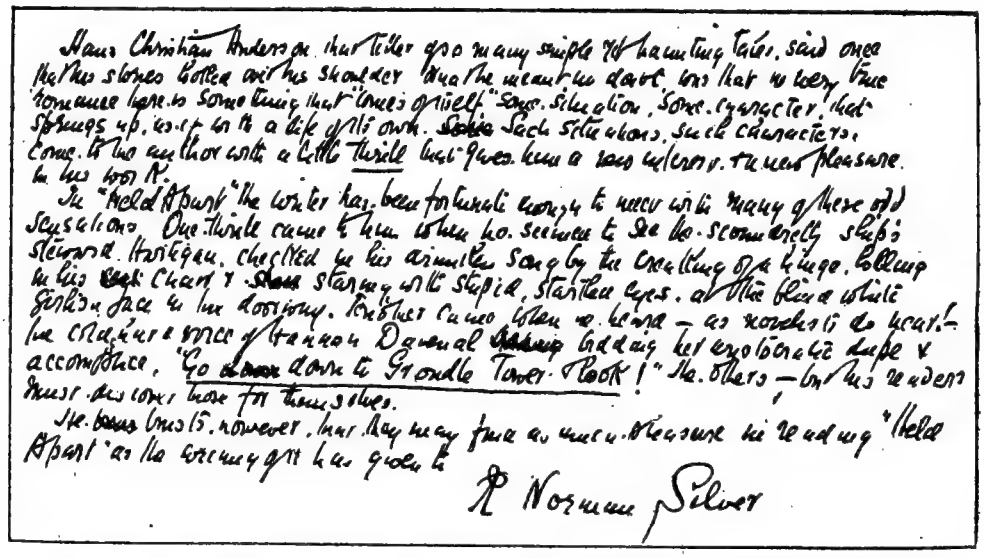
"That's no proof," she retorted; "and besides, he—he has no right to—to part mother and child."

John Davenal looked the speaker in the face. "For nigh on twenty years," he answered, "you have left her where she is, and scarcely cared to know whether she were well or ill."

His voice trembled ominously and he strove to steady it.

"In a year or two," he continued, "she will be of age and her own mistress. I have learnt to love her as my own daughter, and she loves me as if I were indeed her father. She is nothing to you now. What if I were to go to law? I can afford it. There's lawyers as could easily keep the case hanging about—at a price—for years. Where would you be then?"

Hannah Davenal's eyes flashed, but she smiled—an icy, dangerous smile.



A facsimile of Mr. R Norman Silver's handwriting. A competition in connection with it will be found in the Editorial Chat on page 298.

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"Do," she said, "and you will lose Moira more completely than you can dream of; yes, and by the doings of your boasted law. Do you not see that a mystery hangs about her birth, and that it has been allowed to hang for other purposes than you could fathom. However, I will bring that fool of a husband of mine to-morrow and we can settle the matter, once for all. In the meantime mark my words: If you love Moira you will school yourself to part from her, lest a worse thing happen to her—and you. Let sleeping dogs lie, John Davenal, you cannot tell what kind of teeth may be in their jaws."

She turned on her heel and departed without another salutation than her grim warning. As she stalked through the doorway of the cottage she glanced back and saw that the diver had dropped into his chair. His gigantic shoulders were heaving like those of a sobbing woman.

His sister raised her eyebrows, as if acknowledging to a passing surprise. Then she stepped out into the garden, gained the quay, and retraced the route she had come. It led her to the far-off frowning mass of Groudle Tower, that from its wooded eminence commanded the bay.

She reached it in time to dress her mistress for dinner. Lady Tarleton, to lend some colour to her hasty flight northwards, had telegraphed for her country lawyer, and he had hastened over from Carlisle to join in an unnecessary discussion of leases and to dine solemnly with his client and the vicar of the parish.

"We go back to town by the first good train to-morrow," said Lady Tarleton to her maid, as the latter prepared her for bed some hours later.

"Yes, my lady," answered Hannah Davenal. Her mistress touched her arm arrestingly.

"You have considered my offer?" she added, in a low tone.

"I am doing so, my lady," was the reply.

"Five thousand pounds," murmured Lady Tarleton, "for the name and whereabouts of the child."

"I will think of it, my lady," said the maid, slipping on her mistress' sleeping-socks of silk and wool.

"Take your time, of course," remarked Lady Tarleton, coldly.

Her attendant assisted her into bed—a large and canopied four-poster—and she lay down with a sigh.

"You are certainly distressingly clever, Davenal," she said; "but—but don't try to be too clever."

"No, my lady," responded Hannah Davenal imperturbably, and went away.

From her pillow Lady Davenal watched the blazing fire in the wide grate of the apartment. At last her eyes closed and the wrinkles in her lined brow relaxed. The wind got up and howled about the old mansion, the fire died into gloom and then into blackness. The wind fell again, and all was still in and about Groudle Tower, save for the deep-toned strokes of the distant and musical chime that, from the spire of Groudle Church, marked the flight of the hours.

The chill grey March morning began to dawn, a kitchen-maid or two stirred in the recesses of the great house and crept downstairs to their work. The day had begun.

Then, suddenly, at Lady Tarleton's door arose a loud, persistent knocking. There was a rustle of cambric and laces, and she started up.

"What is it?" she said. "Who is there?"

A man's voice answered. "It's me—it's me, my lady," she was told. "The butler, my lady. Can your ladyship see me a moment? Something—something dreadful has happened."

His mistress lit a candle, caught up a dressing-gown, flung it on, and opened the door. Outside, in the dim, wan light of the March morning, stood a manservant, slippered and collarless, and white with a strange excitement.

"It's—it's Davenal, my lady," he said; "your ladyship's maid, my lady. One of the under-maids looked in to call her and—and found her—found her dead, my lady. With a pillow over her face, my lady, and a queer scent in the room like a drug; I should say chloroform, my lady."

(Another long instalment next week.)

Your Editor Chats.

On various pages in this issue you will find all the new features promised for this week. First and foremost in point of interest is the long instalment of Mr. R. Norman Silver's new serial story, "Held Apart," which starts on the front page. As I have told you previously, this is one of the finest romances ever written, and I consider myself peculiarly fortunate in having been able to secure it for *Short Stories*. After you have read this first instalment, I shall be glad to have your opinions as to the merits of the story.

A facsimile of Mr. Silver's handwriting appears on page 297, where the author describes some of the odd sensations which have come over him while writing the story, and how some of the characters struck him. As you will see, the writing is extraordinarily microscopic in character, and consequently not easy to read. A pencil-case will be given to each of the ten readers who send in, on the back of a postcard, a fair copy of what the author has written. Pencil-cases will be awarded to the senders of the first ten correct postcards dealt with. Postcards must be addressed to "The Silver Editor," *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and should arrive not later than first post on Tuesday, March 10th.

The first article of the series, Confessions of a Self-Made Girl, begins on page 304. These confessions record the way in which Maud Cardew, a girl brought up in a very out-of-the-way part of Cornwall, but who was fired with the ambition to make for herself a name and fortune, succeeded in the task she had set herself. That it was not all plain and easy sailing will readily appear on perusal of the articles, which should serve as a lesson to young girls who get the idea into their heads that country life is too slow for them, not giving any scope for their aspirations and ambitions. Such girls often imagine that they have only to come to London to find a fortune ready to be picked up on the very pavements. For one success there are unfortunately scores of failures, and girls must remember that they cannot all be Maud Cardews.

The Love Problem dealt with this week is, "Should a Girl Inform her Lover of a Previous Engagement?" On this question, there must, of necessity, be two opinions, but I think you will agree with me that the one advanced in the story will need a very strong argument to be brought forward by people who hold different views, before it can be condemned as fallacious.

Since last week I have received a large number of letters on the subject of Lady Peggy Carstairs' tirade against middle-class people. The majority are unanimous in condemning Lady Peggy, and do not at all approve of the sentiments she expressed. I have written to her on the subject, and hope to be able to publish her reply next week.

Your Editor.

The announcement regarding the new competition is unavoidably held over.

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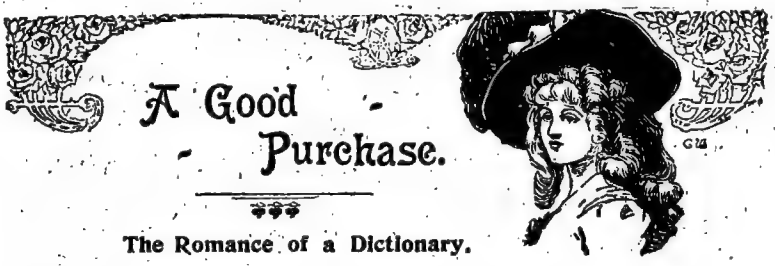

A Good Purchase.

The Romance of a Dictionary.

"Ruth," asked Mrs. Culberson of her daughter, "what was the package that came home for you to-day?"

"A dictionary," Ruth replied.

Mrs. Culberson's dismay could not have been more complete had she been informed that her daughter had brought home a boa-constrictor.

"And what did you get that for, Ruthie?" she asked.

"Because I wanted it," returned Ruth.

"It must have been pretty expensive," hazarded her mother.

"Yes," sighed Ruth. "It cost tenpence halfpenny."

Mrs. Culberson appeared relieved, but not entirely satisfied.

"It seems to me, Ruthie," she went on querulously, "that a girl who works for two pounds a week, which is the only income two people have to depend upon, ought not to be spending her money on a dictionary. If you had tenpence halfpenny to spare for books, why didn't you buy three or four of those paper-backed novels that would be of some interest to me, instead of a dictionary?"

The Culbersons lived in a boarding-house where dictionaries were a rare commodity. Indeed, Ruth's was the only one about the house except Mr. Winter's, which was an exceedingly small pocket edition that contained only the words in most common use.

But somehow, as soon as it became known that there was a large dictionary in Mrs. Culberson's room on the second floor, and that everybody had been given free access thereto, the desire for knowledge was given a wonderful impetus.

But the person who found occasion to refer to the big book most frequently was Mr. Winter. Mr. Winter was a grocer. Of course in his business he daily met with many terms that required elucidation. Hitherto he had found the pocket dictionary perfectly satisfactory, but after the advent of the unabridged dictionary the much-worn, green-backed little book suddenly lost its usefulness, and never an evening passed that Mr. Winter did not rap at Mrs. Culberson's door and politely request to "come in and look at the dictionary a minute."

His prolonged visits annoyed Mrs. Culberson at first. His presence prevented her scolding Ruth, and as he himself seemed deeply immersed in scholastic lore, thus forbidding opening a conversation with him, the poor old lady's evenings became seasons of exquisite torment.

"I don't know what makes him come up here so often," she said pettishly one night after he had closed the dictionary and gone away. "He's an awful bore."

"It's your own fault he comes," said Ruth. "You invited him."

"Of course I invited him," retorted Mrs. Culberson. "I invited all of them. Doesn't he annoy you?"

"No," she said softly. "I don't know that he does."

As the spring days took on the heat of summer Mrs. Culberson became more fretful, Ruth grew younger and prettier, and Mr. Winter studied still later each evening, in blissful oblivion of the added heat of the gas jet.

Mrs. Culberson had long since ceased sitting up waiting for him to go, but bade him good night, and went to bed in the next room.

One evening in early June ten o'clock passed, and Mr. Winter had as yet made no movement towards going away. Ruth watched him closely, as she always did when he seemed engrossed with the words before him, and she noticed that he had not turned a page for more than an hour.

He looked up at length, and their eyes met. Ruth felt her face flushing again, and with the realisation of her weakness the flush grew deeper.

"It's a pretty knotty problem that I have been puzzling over to-night," he said with a sigh.

"Couldn't you find what you were looking for?" she asked softly.

"I hardly know. I found the word I wanted. Whether it will ever mean to me what I would like it to mean I do not know. Here it is. I have been looking at it a good deal lately."

He turned the big dictionary round till she could read the line over which his finger rested. There was one word underlined with a pencil, and she knew it was the one he wished her to see. It was spelt l-o-v-e.

"Is that ever to be for me?" he asked.

The blush had deepened into scarlet then. For a moment a look of exceeding happiness transfigured her face, but a moment later the old troubled expression drove it away. She turned the leaves of the dictionary till she came to the word "mother."

"That's all right," he said, and nodded towards the door. Away near the end of the book her next answer was found.

"Ruth," called out Mrs. Culberson, a quarter of an hour later, "what made Mr. Winter stay so late this evening?"

"He was looking at the dictionary, mother."

"Did he find what he wanted?" asked Mrs. Culberson.

"Yes, mother," said Ruth, "I believe he did."

Clarissa Harding.

Gramophones for Twenty-five Readers.

It is quite the exception to find people who don't like music; there are many who are fond of it, but yet either cannot make it themselves or if they can are not able to afford to buy a piano or other musical instrument. To such, a Gramophone would be an inestimable boon. The only thing you have to do to get the sound is to put in the record of the song or piece you want to hear and then set the machine in motion.

Each Gramophone we are giving away is accompanied by two records, and is fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, which greatly increases the volume of sound.

You can win a Gramophone by making a four-lined verse on the subject of cats, the lines to begin with the letters C A T S in the order given.

For example:

Can you find a greater nuisance,
And one that causes men to swear,
Than the beasts that spoil the evenings
Singing in the moonlight air?

A Gramophone will be given to each of the twenty-five readers who submit the best verses.

Post-cards only must be used and they should be addressed to THE CATS' EDITOR, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and posted so as to arrive not later than first post on Tuesday, March 10th.

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HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA.

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

LADY HONORIA. Sister of the Duke of Eastacres.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister.

ALPHONSE HERVÉ. An eminent French artist in love with Belinda.

PRINCESS VERA ZOULOFF. A celebrated Russian beauty.

BARON ROLLA. An extremely wealthy Parisian, in love with Belinda.

PAUL DE SONNAZ. A young French nobleman, and friend of Lady Peggy.

Honoria Becomes a Most Efficient Ally.

THE words ran like an electric shock through every individual in that gay and laughing crowd. The women of Florence, with the quick emotionalism of your true Italian, turned pale beneath the warm olive of their skin, and uttered shuddering little cries. The English, more reticent, kept a steady face. The Americans, more sceptical, crowded round Claverton with eager questions.

He waived them all aside and went to Vera.

"Did the insect sting you, Princess?" he asked; "think well before you answer. Did it sting you?"

For a second the Princess hesitated. Then, with a little laugh, in mockery, it seemed, of the frightened, upturned faces of her guests, she put her hand to her throat.

"Yes," she said, touching the little spot that marred the whiteness of the skin. "It stung me there. Well," as Claverton fell back with a gesture of despair; "am I doomed?" She laughed again and linked her arm in Hervé's.

"I don't believe you, wise man," she said. "You have spent so long in the twilight of your books, that your eyes are dazed when you come into the light of life. I am too full of health, of joy"—she pressed closer to the artist's side; "to be doomed to death because an insect stung me! To your study, Mr. Claverton, we want no death's head here."

"No," as Alphonse, reading the look on Claverton's face, strove to induce her to leave the ballroom; "I tell you I will not go. I do not believe his croaking; but even if there is truth in it—which I deny—I shall be no better for acting the coward. If, as he says, I have only three days more to live, I will live them to the uttermost. Come, let us dance."

With an imperious gesture she motioned to the musicians and presently the strains of a dreamy valse, with a wistful, sad refrain, echoed through the palace.

The guests, urged by the appeal in the Princess' voice, did their best to seem gay. But it was an impossible task. One after the other the couples stopped, one after the other the women hurried to say farewell.

The words of Claverton in our ears, how could we dance? The proud, beautiful woman, with her reckless defiance, her superb audacity, filled one with a sense almost of terror. One seemed to see the shadow of death in those dark eyes and in the waxen pallor of her skin.

"A horrible fate," murmured Claverton, "yes, but who shall say it is not just? A hundred acts of wanton cruelty have not brought her pain, or punishment, have not given her pause for sorrow or for pity. It is just she should suffer and die The cruelties of your woman of fashion transcend the tortures of Caligula. To gratify your vanity you wear the plumes torn from the breast of a living bird, stained with its blood. You cause the seal to die a lingering death so that its coat shall keep the colour you desire; about your persons you string living things, heedless, careless of the agony they endure.

"For fashion's sake you women slay and torture hundreds, nay, thousands, of living creatures every year; it is just that one of you should suffer for your sins."

Leaving me horrified at his brutality, Claverton turned away. As he went from the palace he gave the servants his address.

"I shall be wanted," he said grimly. "Send when the Princess asks for me, but not before."

The ballroom was quickly cleared. The people hastened from the place until of all the guests who had danced and laughed, how short a time ago, there were left but those who were staying at the Palace.

Belinda, with the desire for action that characterised her, frightened at Claverton's warning, and distressed for Vera, urged David to fetch a doctor.

"He'll make her take something, in case the bite is really poisonous," she said.

Had the girl been in her usual health and spirits she would undoubtedly have summoned a medical man on her own responsibility. As it was, her appeal to David had not much result.

"We had better get advice, I think?" she said to Hervé.

Vera caught the words and frowned upon the speaker.

"Nonsense," she said sharply. "I won't hear of it. I'll not to be frightened by the croaking of an old woman like Claverton. I——" She paused and involuntarily raised her hand to her throat.

A spasm of pain contracted her face. A dull red flush stained the whiteness of her skin, her lips twitched, her whole frame seemed convulsed. With a startled sort of cry she threw up her arms.

"Alphonse! Alphonse!"—the look of torture deepened in her eyes, and her lips grow purple. The scarlet and the gold of her rich dress mocked the grey terror in her face. She could not breathe and she beat the air with her hands.

Her lover, clasping her tightly in his arms, strove to calm her. With a supreme effort of will she rallied.

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"I am not ill, I do not suffer," she said, in a loud, harsh voice; "but, but—send for Claverton!" she gasped.

David hastened to obey her. Alphonse, summoning her women, assisted to take the Princess to her room.

Claverton was at the Palace within a quarter of an hour. He had brought with him an English and an Italian doctor. They both declared themselves nonplussed by the Princess' condition, and, half suspicious, turned to Francis for his explanation.

"The Princess was wearing an insect of a rare species," he said gravely; "found as a rule only in tropical countries. I gather from her maid that the creature, with one or two others, was sold to her by a beetle-catcher some few days ago.

"The insect, from whose sting the Princess is now suffering, lives upon poisonous substances. In other words it feeds upon decayed organic matter. Its exquisite tints are due in great part to its food; its beauty is the result of the corruption it absorbs. That corruption is conveyed in its sting; the Princess is doomed as surely as if she had a knife plunged in her heart."

Some consultation followed between the doctors and the great explorer. Specialists of European repute were sent for, and the members of the Princess' family were summoned.

Amongst the latter was Vera's mother, a fair-haired, little Parisian, with a doll-like face and a petulant, pretty mouth. It was absurd to think that the stately Vera was her daughter.

She arrived on the evening of the day following the ball. Vera refused to see her; despite her awful suffering the Princess' will was as strong as ever. Only the sister of mercy—in Italy the nurses all belong to a religious institution—did she permit to be with her, and at times Belinda.

The little Frenchwoman—Vera's mother—bewailed her daughter's lack of feeling, and determined to insist on entering the bedroom. She begged me to accompany her and I yielded to her persuasion; I wished afterwards I had not done so.

Vera heard the whispered altercation at the door, and, with a flash of her old spirit, called contemptuously that we might enter.

Her face was thin, but as yet the poison working in her veins had left its loveliness untouched.

"Call Belinda," she said peremptorily to the nurse; "and the young Englishman also, and M. Hervé."

In obedience to her word they came, treading softly, silently, as though already in the presence of death.

Vera raised herself, and, with an eloquent gesture, pointed to the sunlit street beneath her window, gay with the bright dresses of the populace, echoing to the sound of music, of voice and of violin.

"It's a fair world, a bright world," she said. "I did not always think so, but now," she smiled at Hervé, "now that I am leaving, I find out all its sweetness. To-morrow I shall not be here. *Don't*," she cried harshly, as her mother commenced to weep in a fretful, childish way. "It makes me sick to hear you.

"What have you ever cared for me, that it should grieve you to lose me? Your self and your aggrandisement you studied, not your child.

"Look," she laughed in her old mocking fashion, "look how my mother weeps, how daintily she cries for fear her tears should discompose her rouge! I tell you," she grasped the little woman's wrist—"I tell you it is you and mothers like you who make women such as I.

"As a baby you turned from me, giving me to the care of hired women. As a child you took no heed of me. As a girl you *sold* me—sold me to the highest bidder—a man steeped to the very lips in sin, who had not one redeeming quality of mind or soul. How much did he pay you, mother?" she gripped the woman tighter. "What did you get besides the glory of the marriage?"

"I did well for you, Vera," cried Madame D'Astrea, much distressed. "Your father left me all but portionless, with nothing in fact but that bleak place in Poland. Had not Zouloff taken a fancy to you, your life must have been passed on the estate, with nothing but peasants and poverty for your companions. I could not have had you with me in Paris—the expense would have been too great."

Vera laughed once more, mirthless and jarring; it disturbed my nerves to a horrible extent.

"As I say, mother, you sold me. And I—I—have had to pay the price. My youth, my innocence, my girlhood were placed at the disposition of the man who bought me. Too late I found out all that marriage with a man like Zouloff meant.

"Too late I learnt all that love might have meant for me. And you, *you* I say"—she struck at her mother wildly—"you have done this. Take her away," she cried. "I could kill her."

Weeping and wailing the little Frenchwoman departed. Vera, her face tense with pain and agitation, motioned Belinda to her side.

"Take care," she said, "that you aren't sold as I was. You love him," she motioned to David. "Why do you wait—why do you give this woman"—she pointed to me—"time and opportunity to tell you? Oh, don't tell me of promises, of duty to your father, respect to *her*," she laughed rudely in my face. "I tell you that the greatest, the most wonderful thing in the world, is Love.

"I have known riches and luxury; I have had adulation and flattery all my life, and now that I am dying I regret none of them—only love. Love that I put aside and turned away, because like you"—she touched Belinda—"I thought of promises and what my mother and the world would say.

"I stayed with my husband and his riches when I should have left them both. You hear me?" She glanced from David to Belinda.

"Put aside all foolish talk of honour and of truth to those who don't know what truth means." Once more she jeered at me. "You have a clever and a dangerous woman against you, and a crafty and unscrupulous man. Marry her, David, marry her, I say, in defiance of everyone."

She gave her hand to the young man as she spoke and with infinite gentleness he bowed his head and raised the hand to his lips. Belinda, more emotional, kissed her, weeping bitterly.

The Princess held her tightly.

"I might have done you harm," she said. "I'm glad I didn't." Then with a gesture of dismissal she turned from them to Alphonse.

As I reached the door of her room I glanced back; Alphonse was kneeling by the Princess' side, his arms about her, his face close to her own. Her hands were clasped round his neck, her head rested on his shoulder. She kissed him many times, then from her lips there broke a passionate cry—a cry that wrung the souls of those that heard it.

"I love you so! I love you so!" she said. "Alphonse, *I cannot* die!"

And then the door shut behind me, and with a grey mist before my eyes and a pain at my heart, I passed from the room.

That night, when Florence was hushed in silence, and the breeze from the hills was blowing fresh and sweet over her palaces and hovels, when the moon's quiet light fell on the marbles of the Santa Trinita, on the bronzed and wrinkled face of a peasant woman sleeping in the open, shining alike on the beauty, the misery, the joy, and the wretchedness of the fair city that night, Vera, Princess Zouloff died.

Some of you that read this, like Francis Claverton, may say she had but her deserts, and that her vanity and cruelty met with its just return. Others may blame, as she did herself, the little Frenchwoman, her mother, who had married her to Michael Zouloff.

For myself, I blame Vera. She had made a brilliant match with a title and a following second only to Royalty. If she was bad-tempered and ungrateful enough to quarrel with the good the gods had sent her, so much the worse for her.

As for the cruelty of wearing live things and all the evil that Francis declared came from the practice, I consider it ridiculous nonsense. Vera should have found out whether

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the creature was harmful or not before she wore it. The beetle-catcher who sold her the insect ought, in my opinion, to have been imprisoned, and so I told Claverton.

In conformity with the wishes of the Zouloff family, Vera was buried in Russia, on the steppes of the Ural Mountains, where lie the eternal snows. The *cortège* started two days after her death. Alphonse was to accompany Madame D'Astrea, who, now that her daughter was dead, looked quite kindly on him.

The evening before the melancholy procession set forth, I surprised Honoria in a whispered colloquy with David. In the terrible state of confusion, worry and trouble that the last few days had brought about, I had overlooked Honoria. I realised that it was time to bring her to book.

"What were you saying to David?" I asked firmly. "Don't prevaricate, Honoria, and for goodness' sake keep still." She was twisting her fingers in a fashion painful to witness.

"Nothing much, at least—— Oh, Lady Peggy," the poor fool looked piteous, "*must* I tell you?"

"If not, you go back to Mark," I answered. "Tell me at once, Honoria, or I send within an hour for your husband. You know what he will say—and do."

"I know, I know," she wailed. "But Belinda, how can I do anything to hurt her? Let me ask her permission, Lady Peggy. When I explain to her that I must either do as you wish or go back to Mark, she will let me tell you. I know she will. Let me go to her. I——"

I cut short her maunderings and with no gentle hand pushed her from the door.

"Once and for all, Honoria," I cried, shaking her in my anger, "will you obey me or go back to Mark? Yes or no—once and for all."

She wrung her hands and the tears streamed from her eyes, but at last in a voice choked with sobs she gave the answer I required.

"Yes, Lady Peggy," she cried, "I'll do as you say. Oh! I wish—I wish that I were dead."

"Quite so," I resumed, "and now what did David say to you?"

"Belinda sent me to tell him that she would meet him to-morrow morning early—quite early—before six o'clock, by the little church on the hill-side—just beyond Florence."

"And what did David answer?"

"He said he would be there. Oh, Lady Peggy, won't you let Belinda come?"

I smiled at the idiocy of the remark.

"Of course I shall," I answered. "Don't you understand, Honoria, that I'm very fond of Belinda, and that I wouldn't for the world do anything to thwart or hurt her? At the same time even you must see that it is not suitable for a young girl to do just as she likes without consulting her elders. In this instance, however, I shall not interfere. David Carr is quite a nice person, I have no objection whatever to his meeting Belinda at the hour named."

She gazed at me with a relieved expression in her cow-like eyes, though why I should insult a well-behaved, domestic cow by a comparison with Honoria, I do not know. At all events her suspicions were lulled; there was no chance of her telling Belinda of our interview, fear of Mark would keep her silent as to that and other things.

Next morning I left the palace early, just as the dawn was breaking over the distant hills. There were as yet but few astir, a *contadina* on her way to market gave me a cheery greeting as I passed, some beggar children, picturesque in their rags and brown-skinned beauty, surrounded me for coin. Other than these none noticed me. I reached the chapel on the hill a little after five and sank down, tired with my walk, upon the soft green turf.

I had not long to wait; David first and Belinda shortly after ascended the path and turned into the grove of lemon trees in whose shade I was waiting.

Belinda, in a gown of pale grey cloth, with her serious face and steadfast eyes, looked like a sister from a convent. Her hands were full of narcissi and sweet-smelling meadow flowers that she had plucked on the way.

Her posies dropped unheeded on the ground a moment later, for with the eager impetuosity of youth David had taken her hands in his and drawn her close, until her face, hidden upon the rough tweed of his coat, flamed crimson to the tip of her small ear.

"Let me look at you, my darling," cried the engineer, "at your beautiful blue eyes, the colour of the eternal sky. Let me kiss your hands dearest, the whitest in the world. Your mouth is the rose of the world to me, my darling. There's not another so sweet, so fresh."

He took her in his arms, and she, glowing with love, upturned her face ripe for his kisses. And there on the hill-side, with the trees above them and the green turf at their feet, there in the early dawning, they two pledged their love afresh.

As I watched them, a cold wave of doubt, touched perhaps with regret, swept over me.

I recalled suddenly, and without volition, a morning such as this, when, as a young girl, I had waited in a wood. It sloped down to the seashore, you could sit in the shade of the pines and listen to the lapping of the waves at your feet.

My hands were full of woodland treasures, wild hyacinth, primrose, and golden ivy, and then as my eyes turned from the sunlit sea to the shadow of the trees someone had come to me. His name? What does it matter. He was the younger son of a younger son. To marry him would have been madness.

My mother only did her duty when she sent him away, a course of action in which, young as I was, I fully acquiesced, and yet for all my wisdom, all that the years had taught, the sight of those young lovers standing beneath the shadow of the trees, the glad sky overhead, the green turf at their feet, gave me a grey, dull feeling of regret.

But in my heart I knew I did not regret the life that I had chosen, and the grey feeling was but momentary.

I stepped softly to where the two were standing. They were talking, or rather David was speaking while Belinda listened.

"I'm bound to finish the contract," said David; "but if I've any luck it will be through by January. The twelve-month of probation will be over then, Belinda."

"Yes," she answered softly. "I can marry you then."

"Why wait till then?" he urged. "Why not take poor Vera's advice and marry me *now?* I asked you once before in Cairo, and you would not listen. You would have done better had you consented, Belinda. Don't refuse me again.

"Listen, I am prepared to make a compromise. Stay with Lady Carstairs, if you wish, till January, but in the meantime to guard against any possible chance of our separation, marry me—secretly. I will not claim you, dearest, until you send for me.

"Consider how great a risk we have run these last nine months. A little more, and Lady Carstairs' plot would have succeeded. I should have thought you vain and fickle, you would have regarded me as faithless. Ah, my love, don't delay, who knows what ill-chance may come between us. What can I do in Russia to guard you here in Italy? Belinda, for our love's sake, don't refuse me!"

She sighed, and nestled closer to his heart.

"I must," she said. "At all costs I will keep my word. Don't think it is easy for me to refuse you. I never wanted you so much as now, David. Of late I am changed. I feel dispirited, dull, I am always tired, and my nerves seem numb.

"Sometimes I am too tired to do battle, and give in to Lady Peggy for the sake of peace and quiet. I am a little, just a little, afraid of Lady Peggy lately, David. I wish, oh, how I wish I could say 'Good-bye' to this life and live quietly and happily with you."

"You own you fear the woman, and yet you won't give me the right to protect you against her?"

Belinda shook her head. "Let me keep my word if I can," she said, "and stay with her for a year. I've written to father and told him I'm not well, and begged him to come to

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me at Christmas. He writes to say that he won't come until the New Year, when my probation ends. He hopes I shall then be ready to marry such a man as he desires for my husband.

"He mentioned Farringdon," she added. "Poor Farringdon, he's a nice boy. No, David, it's no use," as he once more urged his point. "I won't marry you till January—then I shall be free."

"But something may happen, dearest. You may be in trouble or distress."

"Then I will send for you," she answered softly. "I promise you that."

"I mistrust letters, Belinda. Remember Lady Peggy overlooks your correspondence." He pondered for a little, then turned to her with a sudden thought. "See, darling," he said, "there is a medal, a little thing of bronze that a sailor gave me at Sebastopol. If you want me, Belinda, and can't write or wire send me this. I'll come to you at once, no matter where you are."

She took the token, and seemed comforted at its possession.

"If I don't get the medal before, I shall come to you in January at Rome."

She nodded, and lifted her face like a child for his kiss. A few minutes later they separated.

Next day David set out for Russia in company with Alphonse and Mme. D'Astrea—and the dead Princess.

Belinda and I left that same evening *en route* for Monte Carlo. We stopped for the night at a village not many miles distant from Florence. We put up at the inn, a large and old-fashioned hostelry that dates back to the Middle Ages.

Belinda went straight to bed, and fell into a deep sleep. I had administered the usual dose of opium, and feeling sure she would not easily awake, directed my attention to the discovery of David's token. As I might have guessed, the foolish, sentimental idiot had hung it round her neck suspended by a ribbon. She had drilled a hole in the bronze, and thus enabled me to take it with the greatest ease.

It was a quaint trifle, with the head of some particular Russian saint on one side and the date on the other. I left the ends of the ribbon loose, so that the girl might easily suppose that she had lost it.

Then quite satisfied with my night's work I retired to rest. I had stopped up all secret avenues of communication between David and Belinda. I had command of the girl's correspondence, and Honoria, on pain of Mark's displeasure, would not dare to write or wire to him without my knowledge. Moreover I had proof that she would on occasion play the spy on Belinda herself.

I placed the coin with other valuables in my jewel-case, which I locked up in my dressing bag, putting the keys under my pillow. I decided to drop it in a convenient river the next day to prevent its turning up again, but judged it quite safe for the present.

I fell into a peaceful and refreshing sleep, which I suppose must have lasted quite an hour. Something, I can't say what, awoke me with a sudden start. Involuntarily I put my hand beneath the pillow, feeling for my keys. They were there just as I had put them.

Unaccountably disturbed, I slipped on a dressing-gown and hurried into the room which Belinda and Honoria shared. They were both asleep. Belinda, fair and peaceful, her face white in the moonshine; Honoria, her plain face plainer than ever in the silver beams, with its usual expression of dense stupidity, in a deep, heavy slumber.

I went back to my room annoyed at my own fears. The events of the past few days hurried through my mind; I was moved by one of those strange impulses that influence at times to look again at the bronze medal I had taken from Belinda.

I took out my keys, unlocked the dressing-bag, lifted out the jewel case, turned the key in the somewhat intricate lock, ran over my jewels with a smile at my folly, felt for the tissue paper packet that contained the medal.

The paper was there, as I had left it—*but the medal was gone!*

(Another exciting instalment will appear next Tuesday.)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

The Story of a Proposal.

"It's dreadful to be poor," said I, leaning forward.

"Terrible," she assented, with great cheerfulness.

"Are you engaged to —— for the next dance? H'm!"

"N—no. I don't think so."

"May I have it?"

"I don't—oh, yes, if you wish."

"Ah, you don't know what it means to me. I've been looking forward to this for weeks."

"I thought you didn't care much for dancing."

"This isn't exactly dancing, is it?"

We both smiled faintly, and a silence followed.

"Your sister May is to be married in the summer?" I said, merely for the sake of saying something.

"Yes; isn't it jolly?"

"Henderson's a lucky beggar. He seems to get everything he desires—a sweet girl and a fortune to help to make her happy."

"But I think the nicest part of it all is that Jack Henderson was quite poor when he fell in love with May and got engaged to her."

"It was very brave of May."

"It was only natural and—right. And, of course, father and mother believed in Jack."

The last remark somehow chilled me. "It's a fortune in itself, being able to inspire people with confidence in one's abilities. I can't do it," I said, a trifle bitterly.

I felt that she was looking at me, but I did not dare to raise my eyes.

"Perhaps you haven't tried. If you haven't confidence in yourself, you can't inspire it in other people, can you?" she said, softly.

"Oh, I'm not quite so limp as all that. I don't despair of ultimate success, but I fear it will come too late."

"Don't—don't ever be afraid of that."

"Why?" I demanded.

"Oh, because—because——" She stopped, and a flush rose on her cheek.

"Suppose," said I, "that a man has a great desire, and no immediate means of attaining it?"

"Then the man must have patience."

"Yes; and when with patience the means of attaining the desire are won, he finds someone else has taken his desire away, and——"

"And he is justly punished."

"Indeed! For what, pray?"

"For letting his desire be taken away."

"But, good heavens! You talk as if a wo—a desire could be purchased on credit."

"Father says the world would stop if there were no credit," she observed, gravely.

"Not to poor men does that apply."

"I thought credit was meant for people who had money in their heads and hands, though none in their pockets."

"Do you know what you are saying?" I asked, breathlessly.

"I'm awfully silly, am I not?" she returned with a laugh that changed to a sigh. "Isn't it time we were going?"

"Do you know what you were saying?" I whispered.

"What was it?" she said, reflectively. "Oh, don't—don't look at me like that!"

"But answer me."

"Oh, please let me go."

"Not till you answer—oh, my dear."

"Jim!"

"Answer my question, and take your freedom."

There was a long silence, then, "Answer!" I said again.

"Never," she whispered with a little sob.

And so I kissed her.

Charles Jeurdain.

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GREAT NEW SERIES. **FIRST INSTALMENT.**

Confessions of a Self-made Girl

The writer of these Confessions relates in this series of articles the true story of her life, from the time when she left Cornwall, an unsophisticated but ambitious girl, until she made her name and fortune. Her name is well known to you.

My Heart's Desire.

EVERYBODY knows what a self-made man is—well, I am the same thing in the feminine gender. The definition occurred to me this afternoon, when I was sipping tea in my boudoir, and rather took my fancy. I was just wondering casually if any little portion of the world would be interested to hear how a woman climbs? Gradually the idea took possession of me, and having an hour to spare, I hunted up an old box in which I knew I had locked away the diaries I used to keep as a girl.

I soon found them and became quickly absorbed in them; and this persuades me the more that my later years must have an interest for some, seeing they are full of incident, whereas in the earlier ones all was monotony. So I take up my pen hopefully, to make my confessions.

First about those diaries—such funny old books they are—I can scarcely believe I, myself, am really the individual who wrote them.

I was a simple, country girl, in those days, living in an unsophisticated little village, where missionary meetings were great events, and our clergyman the important man of the world. The missionary meetings were occasionally varied with grand amateur concerts (I remember) in the school-room, when local talent aired itself much to its own delectation, if no one else's.

Wonderful concerts were they! I once recollect the village school-mistress having hiccoughs so badly in the middle of "Good-bye, Sweetheart," that she was obliged to leave off; and the village carpenter, swelling to such an extent with pride over his own unique performance, that a button shot off his waistcoat into the middle of the room.

No one was ever in tune, except by accident, but we didn't mind that, and no doubt in any case the piano was most at fault.

But these are such old memories, I don't know why I rake them up now, unless because it is New Year's Eve, and a time conducive to retrospect. I see I always wrote on New Year's Eve without fail, so this is a most suitable evening upon which to take up my pen again.

In the last entry of all there is a strain of intense longing after some life, and some aim altogether new.

I wonder if I knew what I wanted at the time? If I had any definite aim? Or if I only had a vague idea that the height of bliss was to wear beautiful clothes, have countless admirers, and drive in carriages.

Judging by my diaries, I was a clever young person on the whole, so maybe it is not very surprising that I won my ambition.

"Won it?" you ask, and I see you look up with interest, for those who succeed are always so much more interesting than those who fail. I don't think it should be so.

To me, looking back from my vantage ground of success, there is something sublime in failure. I don't know how to describe it, but on this New Year's Eve I feel I would like to write a letter to everyone who had aimed at something big and failed, and tell them failure is a grander thing than success. I suppose they would all sneer at me, and doubtless in their place I should do the same. It is so easy for those who have won to talk.

Eight years ago to-night I sat in a little, low, cottage room, lighted my precious bit of stolen candle, and wrote in a round, girlish hand, that "I could not bear the village life much longer, for the monotony and littleness of it were eating into my soul, which panted ever for great things."

I smile as I read that sentence. I must have been a very high-flown, sentimental young woman in those days.

Well, I didn't have to bear it much longer, for the very next week the beginning of the new order commenced, and this evening I sit down in the midst of wealth and luxury to take up the broken thread.

There are rings on my fingers such as I had not dreamt of then, and my room is strewn with priceless knick-knacks, almost any of which would buy up my wardrobe of those old days two or three times over. Oh, yes! And I drive in carriages, and wear diamonds, and, as for lovers, they are the bane of my life!

But I like to see the old books lying here looking so dingy and out of place. They have a fascination for me that I cannot shake off, and is something deeper than just the measure of my success.

For, after all, what is success? Sometimes, in what I call my queer moods, I look round me and say: "Are you satisfied, Maud Cardew? Has it been worth while?" And there is no answer. Only I don't want to be the village girl again, not by any means. I want to go on now to the top, and when I get there I will confess whether the game was worth the candle.

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But to go back to the beginning, one of the most interesting entries in my diaries is the one after I first met the Honourable Bobbie Lestrange and his friend, Di Northcote. Some day perhaps I will show it to Bobbie, but just at present he is so tiresomely persistent in his attentions, that I am almost afraid to speak a civil word to him.

I have told him fourteen times that I will not marry him, and still he goes on asking, and says he intends to until I take him for the sake of peace and quietness.

It was Robert Alexander Caryl Lestrange, third son of the Earl of Mynton, and generally known in all quarters as the Honourable Bobbie, who gave me the first helping hand eight years ago, through his friend Di Northcote.

This is how it happened—it is more like a story than real life.

I must tell you I lived by the sea in those days, and my favourite occupation was to sit in an old ruined castle on the cliff, and stare at the waves, weaving fantastical dreams. Then one day, I think it was my eighteenth birthday, I became suddenly possessed with a wild desire to make my dreams realities.

I reviewed my past with a now feeling of disgust at its seeming littleness, and took a solemn oath to myself that the future should be different.

Then I stood a long time staring at the big waves lashing themselves into fury at the foot of the giant cliffs, lost in eager thought.

"What shall I do?" I asked myself, gazing fascinated at those rolling waves.

"Something big," came the answer readily. "Something tremendous! Overpowering!" And my heart swelled. Everything there, except the human beings, seemed on such a grand scale; I could not brook the thought of being left behind and remaining a mere countrified nonentity.

The younger man appeared first, and when he saw me he started so violently I thought he would have fallen.

I felt I did not belong to the rest. The little joys and pleasures of that uneventful, country life in no way appealed to me; instead, they fretted and galled me; come what might, and in whatever way, I must at least do something *big!*

But what?

I threw back my head, feeling the fresh, eager blood course through my veins, fired by the sudden passion of doing and being.

If only I could find an outlet? I was not afraid. All my life I had scarcely known what fear was; if courage could achieve I ought to conquer the world.

I stretched out my arms to the horizon, drawing deep breaths of desire, and felt myself rapidly becoming consumed by an ambition as wide and deep and measureless, as the pulsing Atlantic below me.

"I will achieve! I must!" I cried, and stopped short suddenly, arrested by the sound of voices close at hand. They came from the other side of the Old Keep wall, and I could hear every word distinctly without being seen.

"Rum old pile!" said someone, in rather boyish tones. "Must have had great times here a thousand years ago. Useful to be able to pop your man over the battlements right into the sea when he got obnoxious."

"This drawbridge must have been a marvel of engineering," said another, rather deeper voice. "How in the world did they ever get the thing fixed with that yawning chasm on each side?"

"Yawning chasm!" laughed the first speaker mockingly. "Do be careful, Di. You'll turn into a poet as well as a philosopher if you don't mind. You must be more particular what you eat. Let's climb round that corner into the Old Keep."

I held my breath and stood motionless. I do not think any one excepting myself ever attempted to round that wild corner, and there was no other approach, I was caught like a bird in a trap. The younger man appeared first, and when he saw me he started so violently I thought he would have fallen.

"By Jove!" he muttered, and gazed at me in a fascinated way.

"What's up?" called the other man. "You nearly went over, you silly young idiot!"

Then the second man appeared, and, though he was not so startled, he looked very hard at me.

He was a good deal the elder I learnt afterwards, a man of immense capabilities, of which he was too much of an æsthetic to make use.

His companion had not long left college, where he had sown a somewhat over-plentiful crop of wild oats, and was now travelling incognito to repair a damaged fortune, and none too brilliant reputation. The elder man spoke first.

"I hope we are not trespassing?" he said, with a charming smile. "We little expected to find a lady in a rocky eerie with such an impossible approach."

Both were still looking rather hard at me, and I felt the blood rush to my cheeks, while I looked at the ground in some confusion.

"Oh, no, you are not trespassing!" I managed to say. "Anyone has a right here, but I think I am the only one who ever comes."

"You must be a wonderful climber," he said, in the same pleasant voice, and the younger man murmured something indistinctly about angels having wings.

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"I am used to it," I answered. "I have lived here all my life, and I climbed about on the cliffs almost as soon as I could run."

"It is a beautiful spot, but very wild," he said. "I expect you get shipwrecks here occasionally."

"Yes, I have seen several."

"How jolly exciting!" exclaimed the younger man. "Did you ever go out in the life-boat? You look a perfect Grace Darling."

The way in which he said the last sentence made me feel hot suddenly, and I looked up prepared to be angry, but something about him was so winsomely boyish, I only coloured and smiled. This seemed to please him.

"Will you tell us about them?" he asked, with a little persuasive air, and seated himself on a boulder, while his companion leant against the old wall.

"Most of them went to pieces as soon as they struck," I told him, "and all hands were lost, but once a young fisherman saved six Italians on that island," and I pointed to a perpendicular cliff standing four hundred feet out of the sea.

"By Jove! Did he though?" exclaimed the younger, who was, of course, the Honourable Bobbie, while his companion, Di Northcote, added with conviction—

"He must have been a plucky chap! Did he go over the face of the cliff?"

"Yes," I answered, warming to my subject, "it was a splendid deed. Do you see that little ledge near the bottom? They climbed on to that and clung to it with their hands and feet. Charlie Hall then went down to them with a rope."

"Why didn't they weight the rope and let it down that way?" asked Bobbie. "It must have been a ticklish job."

"There is a rock overhangs the ledge," I explained. "You can't see it from here, but it would have prevented them reaching the rope. Charlie swung himself to them by pushing out from the cliff with his foot."

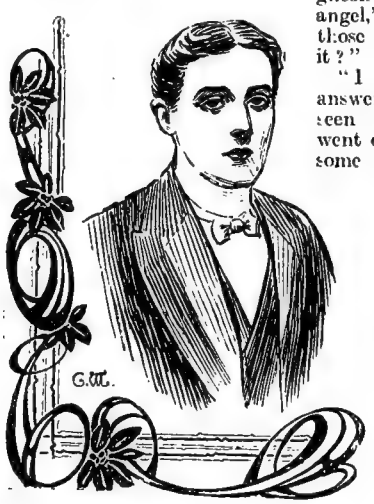
"Great Cæsar!" exclaimed the Hon. Bobbie, and dug his hands deep into his pockets, while the other man grew yet more interested.

"They drew their knives at him," I went on, "because they didn't understand that he was going to save them, and he had great difficulty in explaining."

"What did they think he wanted to do?" said Bobbie flippantly. "Pick out the fattest for his Sunday's dinner?"

I smiled at Bobbie then, for I liked the twinkle in his blue eyes, whereas I felt a little in awe of his friend, and avoided his gaze. He gave one a curious sensation of being read through and through, while all the time he appeared only lackadaisical and callous.

"Tell us some more about the coast," said Bobbie, in his coaxing way. "It's over-run with fairies, and demons, and ghosts, with an occasional angel," wickedly, "and all those sorts of things, isn't it?"



"I didn't know it," I answered, "I have never seen any." However, I went on to tell them about some of the legends and tales relating to the neighbourhood, and I have sometimes marvelled since how I, the unsophisticated country girl, could thus suddenly converse with these two strangers to their evident enjoyment.

I think it was chiefly Mr. Northcote's doing, for he asked me so many questions, and seemed so interested, it was very delightful to talk to him.

Bobbie did not say much, and I don't think he listened very particularly; he just sat and gazed at me in a way that I should have found exceedingly embarrassing, had I not been so engrossed in the conversation.

In the end a sudden idea struck me. I clasped my hands behind my back in a favourite attitude, and leant against a piece of wall.

"It is your turn to tell me something now," I said, looking from one to the other, "I want to know about your world."

They exchanged glances, and Bobbie looked amused.

"Which part of it?" he said. "It wouldn't all do for the *Church Times*, you know."

I turned to Mr. Northcote inquiringly.

"Have you come from London?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "Have you ever been there?"

"I have not been more than twelve miles from here in my life," I told him.

He looked surprised, and Bobbie gave a low, expressive whistle.

"Begin at the beginning, Di," he said, mischievously, "and work gradually towards the high-minded, superior condition of present day Society. Otherwise it might be too much for Miss—Miss——" and he looked at me inquiringly.

"My name is Cardew," I said, "Maud Cardew, I want to hear about London. Tell me what you like!"

There was a moment's pause, then Bobbie remarked, with that irresistible twinkle in his eyes, "Fire away, Di! Begin with the Gaiety girls!"

"What are the Gaiety girls?" I asked, as Mr. Northcote only smiled.

"Nobody very particular," he answered. "At least, not outside their own circle. What would you like best to hear about?"

"I want to hear about everything," I said.

"It would take such a long time," put in Bobbie, "that we shall really have to consider remaining a day or two, eh, Di? Jolly, snug little place this, you know, and we might get a bit of good sailing. Perhaps Miss Cardew will tell us where to stay?" and he turned to me again.

"I am quite agreeable," said his friend, and they waited for me to speak.

"You can stay at the farm if you like," I told them. "There is plenty of room, and my father likes a chat with strangers."

They both agreed readily, going home with me soon after.

It was on the evening before they left that Bobbie and I strolled to the Old Keep, while Mr. Northcote was out riding. We had been a good deal together during the two days they stayed with us, though seldom alone. I couldn't help thinking this last was Mr. Northcote's doing.

Without seeming to follow Bobbie, he always appeared to have a watchful eye over his proceedings; and once or twice, when he was inclined to be very affectionate, I heard him mutter in an aside—"Don't be a fool, Bob!" and it made me hot and resentful. Yet I think I liked him from the first, although then and ever since he has riled me more than anyone I have ever known.

I was glad to have Bobbie to myself that evening, because I could get what I liked out of him, whereas his friend was very reticent. We sat down when we had climbed the steep path, and watched the sunset reddening the sails of the fishing-boats, and shedding a golden glory like a halo over the world.

"It's a bit of all right, isn't it?" said Bobbie, who had a peculiar mode of his own of expressing sentimentality.

"It's grand!" I answered, and felt the old restless craving stealing over me.

"It makes you look hungry," he said, "is that how you always show your appreciation?"

"It makes me hungry," I answered, clenching my hands.

He seemed interested.

"Hungry for what?" he asked.

"Anything—everything!" I cried. "I am sick to death of my existence here. I must be and do something better

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than this before I die. I want to know about the world beyond. What is there the other side of the sunset? What is there behind these dreary hills? Tell me more about it. You know so much and care so little, while I am just starving."

I leant towards him eagerly, and he seemed to catch a like fire from my earnestness.

"Yes, it must be rather deadly," he said, and glanced round. "You'd have rather a good time in London, too," he added.

"Why?" I asked, and felt myself compelling him to reply, with some only half-conscious power. I say half-conscious, because I did not know what it was then. I have learnt since, and, what is still more important, how to use it.

He looked at me a moment, then he said, "Did anyone ever tell you that you were beautiful?"

"Am I beautiful?" I asked, feeling as if the whole world hung on his answer.

"Yes," he replied. "I don't know that I ever saw anyone more beautiful."

I drew a deep breath, and looked away from him for a little while in silence. What I had suspected then was true. It opened endless vistas to me.

"Do beautiful women *always* have a good time in London?" I demanded next.

"It depends upon many things," watching me curiously.

"Tell me what you mean by a good time?"

"Oh, carriages and horses. And flowers and heaps of admirers."

"Yes, yes; what else?"

He smiled at my eagerness. "If you look at me like that I shall have to kiss you," he said.

I felt myself crimson, and drew back.

"You wouldn't be angry, would you?" he asked.

"Yes, I think I should," I replied, not quite sure myself.

"But why? It's so harmless."

"Tell me some more," I urged, to change the subject. "Tell me what else beautiful women do in London?"

"Well, they make a big hole in a chap's pocket very often," he continued whimsically; "and they play the dickens with men's hearts when they get the chance."

"What else?"

"They spend small fortunes on costumes. They go to all the theatres, and like the most extravagant supper parties imaginable."

"How I should love it!" I exclaimed, and drew a deep breath, adding—"And what do the men do?"

"Pay the piper as a rule," drily.

"Supposing the beautiful woman is poor?" I asked, fixing him with my eyes.

"Oh, then——" he began, and paused. "Well, then——" he shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, hang it all!" he finished callously, "it doesn't really make much difference. It's much the same thing in the end, only one's called respectable and the other isn't; but it's no end of a fine line."

I looked at him wonderingly, at a loss to understand, which he quickly perceived.

"You look as if you were going to ask me what I mean," he said; "but I shouldn't if I were you. It's a jolly old world in spite of everything; and I'm not tired of having it at my feet by a long way."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Why is the world at your feet?"

He coloured slightly, and looked conscious.

"Oh, nothing!" he answered, with seeming carelessness. "I had a bit of money a little time back, that's all—except that I wish I'd got it now."

"Is it the same with Mr. Northcote?"

"Not quite."

"I shouldn't think he cares."

"Cares about what?"

"Having the world at his feet."

"Not he. He thinks he's a jolly lucky beggar not to have a position to keep up."

I wondered a little what he meant, but was too engrossed with my own thoughts to pay much heed.

At last I got up and stood with my head thrown back in the old way, and my eyes on the sea. "I want to have the world at my feet," I said, "I *must* succeed. Tell me what to do."

"If some of the world could see you now," he said, with admiration depicted upon every line of his face, "I daresay it would crawl there."

I stamped my foot impatiently.

"But it can't see me," I exclaimed, "so what is the use of talking like that. Tell me what to do."

"Marrying a nobleman or an American millionaire is a good start," he said.

"Which is the better?"

"Well, the nobleman, I suppose; because then the other noblemen's wives can't sit on you just as they like."

"Then I will marry a nobleman," I said, and faced him suddenly.

He looked staggered a moment, then lay on his back and laughed aloud. "By gad! you've got a cheek!" he said, and seemed to enjoy it immensely. Then he sat up. "Never mind about all that stuff to-night," he remarked. "It's my last evening. Come and sit down and be affectionate and nice."

"I don't want to," I answered. "I would rather talk about London and success. I mean to be a great lady."

"How are you going to do it?" he asked.

"I don't know," I replied. "I will go to London and see."

He grew more serious. "I don't think I would," he remarked.

"Why not?" facing him squarely.

"You ought to have someone to look after you if you do," evasively.

"Why?"

"It doesn't do for beautiful girls to be friendless in London."

"I can take care of myself, and I am not afraid."

He watched me a few moments thoughtfully.

"By Jove!" he said at last. "I believe you'll do it. If I'm not much mistaken you've got the grit, and that's the chief thing.

"I'll tell Di," he said later. "He knows everybody; and might be able to help you."

At first I felt abashed before Di Northcote's look, when Bobbie told him of my intention. It was so evident that he believed there was something behind, and I was playing a part.

"If I were you," he said at last, "I would stay where I am."

I told him that I had fully made up my mind to go.

"What can you do?" he asked. "I'll help you if I can?"

I told him "nothing."

"My dear girl," he began.

"Yes, I know," I interrupted. "What matters is, will you try to help me or not? I shall go in either case."

He looked searchingly at me a moment.

"I see you have made up your mind," he said. "There's little enough I can do, but I don't mind trying to give you a hand."

A few days later I stood again in the Old Keep, and looked to the sea.

"I'm going to conquer the world!" I said, addressing the waves and seagulls and massive cliffs. "Maud—Duchess of Ayr—I salute you!"

(Next Tuesday Maud Cardew writes of her arrival in London, and an adventure she had in the fog.)

ALICE THURSTON'S PRISONER;
Who Afterwards Became Her Husband.

Alice Thurston was the sole support of her aged grandmother. Being an intelligent girl, she managed to earn a modest living.

Of course there were times when she was unable to settle all financial affairs that accompany all households, and this raw March morning their landlord informed them he would call at ten o'clock and expect confidently to receive the rent money which was long overdue.

Precisely at a quarter to ten Mr. Brown rose from his desk and brushed the brown hair just tinged with grey from his square, yet not unkindly brow. He went forth into the chilly air fully determined to get his due from Mrs. Howard,

It was a quaint house, with neat lawn and scrupulously clean porch and steps that were much worn from frequent scrubbing.

None of these circumstances, however, did Mr. Brown notice as he pulled the glittering brass door knob and walked into Mrs. Howard's sitting-room.

A cheerful fire was burning in the grate, and at a table, with writing material before her, sat a young lady whom the landlord recognised at once as the granddaughter of Mrs. Howard.

She was quite a pretty girl, though you would never have thought of classing her among the beauties. With curling black hair and dark, long-lashed eyes, she was not disagreeable to look upon. There was something very attractive in the dignity of her manner.

Miss Thurston rose with a polite bow, which was only dimly reciprocated by Mr. Brown.

"I have called to see your grandmother, Miss Thurston."

"I am well aware of the fact, Mr. Brown, but being conscious of her extreme nervous condition, have sent her from the room, preferring to deal with you myself."

The calm audacity of this girl fairly startled Mr. Brown.

"The money I hope, is ready?"

"No, I am sorry to say, we are unable to meet your demand."

"Pardon me, miss, I must speak plainly, an officer will be here this afternoon to put a valuation on the furniture and——"

"You shall do nothing of the kind," interrupted Alice, her cheeks reddening and her eyes flashing furiously.

Mr. Brown walked towards the door, as if to go, but, before he realised what he was doing, Alice had quietly locked the door and taken the key out and returned to her seat by the table.

"What do you mean, miss?" exclaimed the astonished prisoner.

"You will now be obliged to reconsider the question," said Alice.

"Obliged?"

"Yes, you will hardly jump out of the window; there is no other attainable egress, unless you choose to ascend the chimney, and I don't think you wish to soil that lovely suit of yours.

"You are a very rich man, Mr. Brown, and own rows of houses, railway shares, stocks and bonds and mortgages and other enterprises too numerous to mention.

"My grandmother is very a poor woman and I support her with what work I can get. Now, would you cause us so much suffering by being so cruel? You are not a bad man, Mr. Brown, you have many noble qualities and I like you for them."

She paused a moment and looked intently and gravely at the landlord.

It was not unpleasant to be told by a pretty girl that she liked him on any terms, yet he had indulged in some plain speaking.

"I have been told," she continued, "of many acts of kindness you have performed. You must show some sympathy in this case. You are extremely cross this morning, perhaps it is the weather, for I do not think you are always thus.

"Hush, I accept no excuse. You are inclined to be irritable and overbearing. If I were your mother and you a little tainly put you in a corner until be good."

boy I should cer- smiled, although he was at the you promised to moment really feeling very angry.

Mr. Brown

Alice went on with the utmost composure.

"Under the circumstances I can only detain you as my prisoner until you promise not to bother us until I am able to pay, which will not be very long. Then, and only then, will you get your money. Do you promise? Yes or no?"

"I refuse," said the landlord tartly.

"Please yourself, Mr. Brown, I can wait."

Miss Thurston deposited the key in the pocket of her dress, and sat down and proceeded to write.

Had she been a man there is no telling what he would have done; as it was, she wore an invisible armour of power in the very fact that she was a woman, and she knew it.

"Miss Thurston," said he, very sternly, "unlock that door, or I shall call for help."

"All right, do so if you wish."

"Miss Alice."

"Mr. Brown."

"Do you know it is twelve o'clock?"

"Yes, I think I heard it strike."

"I should like to get some lunch."

"I am sorry that luxury is beyond your power to-day."

How provoking she was. Mr. Brown eyed the pocket of her blue dress greedily and walked up and down the room in dismay.

"I have an appointment for one o'clock."

"What a pity you cannot keep it."

He took another turn across the room. Alice raised her eyes to his, and with a saucy smile said:

"Well, are you ready to promise?"

"Unfortunately, yes. What else can I do?"

"You promise?"

"I do, because I can't help myself."

"You have made me very happy, Mr. Brown," said Alice, as she drew the key from her pocket and unlocked the door. "I know you think me very unwomanly and perhaps bold, but if you only knew to what extremities we have been forced by poverty, I am sure you would not censure me so severely. Good morning, Mr. Brown."

With many curious and complicated thoughts and emotions struggling through his brain did Mr. Brown go forth, in which dark, flashing eyes and blue dresses played a very prominent part.

The very next day he called to assure Miss Alice he had no intention of breaking the promise she had exacted from him and he called again in a few days to tell her she need entertain no doubt as to his integrity and the next week he dropped in with no particular errand as an excuse.

Could it be possible that Mr. Carl Brown, the confirmed bachelor, had at last been captured by Alice Thurston, his pretty young tenant?

Until this interview he had always scorned women, but a great change had come since, and he succumbed to her charms.

Before Alice Thurston engaged herself to her wealthy suitor she extracted from him the promise that he would provide her grandmother with every comfort in her declining years and she was fond of telling how she gained a husband by making a prisoner of him in the first instance.

M. S. Bell.

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LOVE PROBLEM NO. 7.

The New Love and the Old.

Should a Girl Inform Her Lover of a Previous Engagement?

EVERY window in the Assembly Rooms at Davyhulme blazed forth light and welcome.

Noting the general air of festivity, one turned instinctively to look for the customary red strip of carpet and the canvas awning at the entrance gates, and found them both. And then, perhaps, if the passer-by were a philosopher or a woman, he or she might stay to look on for a few moments.

Cab after cab rolled up to the rooms. The porter whisked the door open, and mysterious figures, hooded and cloaked most tantalisingly, stepped daintily to the ground, ran nimbly over the red strip, and disappeared in a twinkling. The porter slammed the door and the cab rattled forward into the darkness to make way for the next arrival.

To Jack Shrewsbury, who presently arrived with his *fiancée* and her mother, this was the proudest evening of his life.

In the first place he had only been engaged to Dora Slade for three days, and, as everyone knows, the first delirium of the love fever lasts for at least a week. After that time the love continues, but the fever abates somewhat.

This was their first appearance in public since the engagement. As they hurried across the red strip he felt convinced that the eyes of all the crowd were fixed upon her in overpowering admiration. Every young man who is worth his salt passes through this stage, and indeed it must be admitted that some do so more than once.

As Jack, having taken off his hat and overcoat, and stroked his hair three times—once over each ear, and once over his forehead—was waiting for the ladies, a friend of his, named Beesley, came towards him, accompanied by a stranger.

"Good evening!" said Beesley. "May I introduce two particular friends of mine to each other? Mr. Ridgeway—Mr. Shrewsbury."

They shook hands, muttering the usual commonplaces.

Beesley beamed upon them both, as one conscious of a good action.

"You two chaps ought to be good friends," he added, "for you're both mad—on books."

After this he hurried away, probably to seek some saner companionship, and the two new acquaintances fell to comparing notes on the subject of their madness.

Ridgeway, who had formerly lived in Davyhulme, had been stationed in London at the headquarters of his firm, for two years. He had now returned to take up the sub-managership at the office where he had started his business life. By a strange coincidence the literary tastes of the two men were almost the same, and their friendship throve on this common basis.

Then Ridgeway's sisters came to claim him, and he made an appointment to call on his new friend the following evening. Shortly afterwards, Dora Slade and her mother appeared, and Jack hurried to meet them, with a guilty sense of having absolutely forgotten Dora for more than ten minutes.

They danced the first waltz together, more as a matter of duty than anything else, for Jack was but an indifferen dancer. Then Dora was whisked away for a bewildering succession of lancers, quadrilles and barn dances, while Jack sat beside her mother and realised that for one who despises dancing and yet becomes engaged to the best dancer in the district, the course of true love will certainly not run smoothly.

To add to this discomfort, just after Dora had been claimed for a waltz by his new friend, Ridgeway, he became an unwilling listener to a conversation between the mother of the latter and Dora's mother. Mrs. Ridgeway, who had returned to Davyhulme with her son, greeted Mrs. Slade as an old friend, and took a seat beside her.

"Dora is here, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes!"

After saying this, Mrs. Slade glanced nervously over her shoulder, and then turned partly round, intending to introduce Jack to Mrs. Ridgeway. But the latter plucked eagerly at her old friend's sleeve.

"Wouldn't it be nice," she said, "if my son and Dora would only make up their lover's quarrel?"

Mrs. Slade interposed hurriedly, in a vain endeavour to prevent further confidences. "Allow me to——"

"And really, my dear," continued Mrs. Ridgeway, gazing across the room towards a quiet corner, "it almost appears as though my wish—or rather *our* wish—will be gratified. Do you see them sitting together in the recess of the window? My boy is whispering, and your girl is blushing, and those are both good signs. But, whatever is the matter, my dear, are you not well?"

"It's a little oppressive—the room is so hot," said Mrs. Slade faintly. "But I wanted to introduce to you——"

She turned round. Jack Shrewsbury had disappeared.

* * * * *

Dora and her former lover were gliding round the room to the dream-like music of a waltz. Round and round they swept and circled, in and out amongst the crowd.

Dora was enjoying this dance better than any other during the evening, for Ridgeway waltzed to perfection. As for him, the dreamy rhythm of their movement, and the fact that his arm encircled one he had formerly cared for so much, produced a kind of glorious intoxication in his heart.

He surpassed himself in his dancing, and his enthusiasm reacted on his partner, until suddenly she caught a glimpse through the crowd of Jack, sitting patiently beside her mother. She felt somehow that she was not behaving altogether fairly to him. Not that she could have given any reason for the sudden compunction, it was an intuition, that was all.

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"Do you mind if we forego the rest of this dance?" she murmured.

"Certainly! I am sorry—you are not unwell, I hope?"

"No, a little tired," she answered, and turned towards the end of the room, where she remembered to have seen Jack and her mother.

"Don't go back yet," he pleaded. "There is such a cosy corner in this bay window, and I want to ask you something!"

The strength of his enthusiasm overpowered her, as enthusiasm generally does in these cases. And perhaps she had a premonition of what he wished to say, and thought it better to have it settled at once.

"Do you remember the time when I left Davyhulme, two years ago?" he said.

It is curious how girls try to avoid a proposal of marriage, even in cases where they have looked forward to it for months.

"You—yes, you obtained a better position in your office," said Dora.

"No, I don't mean that—I mean——"

"You went to the headquarters of your firm."

"I don't allude to business matters at all, but to a certain engagement which formerly existed between you and me!"

"My mother and yours are watching us," murmured Dora, and felt to her dismay that she was blushing shamefully.

"I don't care if all the world watches us," he growled, "so long as I am with you. But you are not listening!"

"I beg your pardon," said Dora, in sudden distress, "but I saw a friend going out of the room."

"A friend?"

"Yes, and I want to tell you——"

"In one moment," he whispered impetuously. "But rude or not, I cannot wait any longer. You know what I mean. I've thought about our quarrel many a time since going to London, and would have written to you from there, only I thought—I didn't like—I thought there might be someone else—since we parted——"

"There is someone else," said Dora, and rose to her feet as the music ceased. "Will you take me back to my mother, please?"

* * * * *

Whatever Jack's daily remuneration may have worked out to, he certainly did not earn it on the day after the dance.

His head ached badly after a sleepless night, his heart ached still more; he thought of everything but his work, and was glad when five o'clock came at last, and when he was alone in his lodgings.

At one moment he fell a prey to violent despair, and then suddenly he would seize a heavy ruler and bring it down with terrific force on the head of an imaginary Ridgeway.

He did not know how long the latter had been away from Davyhulme, so instead of two years he took it for granted that Dora's former engagement had been terminated quite recently. Probably she only accepted Jack out of pique.

The idea once suggested, he forthwith transformed it in his own mind into a stubborn fact, as all jealous lovers would have done under similar circumstances. And then upon this sandy ground he built up a most imposing indictment against Dora, although he would certainly have punched the head of any man who had dared to suggest even one of the items to him.

After all, Dora was not to blame. It was that fellow Ridgeway—Ridgeway, who would arrive at any moment in pursuance of the invitation he had given to him last night.

A wild idea of springing out upon his rival with sword and buckler—or possibly poker and tongs—he banished regretfully, as being somewhat old-fashioned. Then he scribbled a hurried note apologising for his absence, but he tore it up as soon as he had written it.

It was already seven o'clock, and Ridgeway might arrive at any moment. He decided to go out for a three hours' walk without leaving any explanation for the expected visitor.

It was not that he feared to meet him, rather the reverse, but he had a feeling that his first explanation was due from Dora, and he preferred it to come from her. So he thought, as he pulled the street door to the latch and hurried along the dark, badly-lighted road.

Dora and her mother lived scarcely three minutes' walk distant, in the next street in fact, but, anxiously as he longed for her explanation, he was not going to beg for it.

As for leaving them whilst they were in a measure under his charge at the Assembly Rooms last night, his friend Beesley had pledged himself to offer his services to escort them to the cab, whilst apologising for Jack's absence. So his conscience was quite clear on that count.

Probably he would receive a letter in the morning, or she might call at his lodgings that evening, with her mother to play propriety of course. They might arrive while Ridgeway was there! The mere possibility of this brought him to a sudden standstill, and next moment somebody bumped against him in the darkness.

"Confound—I beg your pardon."

"Why don't—oh, quite right."

"Mr. Ridgeway!"

"Mr. Shrewsbury! I am on my way to your rooms."

Jack's anger boiled over in an instant. "I'm afraid I can't have the pleasure of entertaining you," he said abruptly, "certainly not until I know what you were saying to Miss Slade last night."

"What!"

"You were sitting together in the recess of one of the bay windows," continued Jack, speaking with a kind of explosive calmness, "and you were very confidential together."

"Far more confidential that I shall ever be with you," retorted Ridgeway. "By what right do you make such an impertinent request?"

"The best of all rights," said Jack. "I am, or was, engaged to the girl we are discussing."

"If you speak only of the past I can make the same claim. I was engaged to Miss Slade myself two years ago."

"Two years ago?"

"Good evening," said Mrs. Slade suddenly, affecting wisely not to have noticed any signs of disagreement. "We were just coming to see you, Jack, but as we've met you so opportunely, will you come with us and be our visitor instead of host?"

Jack bowed awkwardly, and glanced at Dora, who was with her mother.

"Dora has something special to say to you," continued the good lady, "so you two had better walk together, and perhaps Mr. Ridgeway will also favour us for an hour or two?"

"Very pleased," said Ridgeway, who saw a prospect of general explanations, and he led the way with Mrs. Slade, leaving the lovers to follow.

Then Jack remembered the long indictment he had drawn up against Dora, and prepared to launch it at her forthwith.

"If you had only told me," he murmured reproachfully.

"Next time I'm engaged I will," said Dora penitently. "At least I don't mean that exactly. But I do think it was shameful the way you went off and lost all your trust in me in a moment.

"A simple question would have cleared everything at once, and I think if you had really cared for me you would have waited and asked me. Lots of girls wouldn't have had anything more to do with you; come into supper at once, now, and perhaps I'll forgive you."

"I'm very sorry," he said, as they passed into the house. Somehow, whenever Dora was wrong it was always poor Jack who had to beg pardon. But that is quite the customary thing, as all engaged couples know. **Wal Frank.**

Result of the "Clergy Tartan" Competition.

The Gramophone prizes have been sent to:

J. Greenaway, junr., Baldwyns Hill, Loughton, Essex; H. W. Gallop, 144 Wantz Road, Maldon, Essex; F. Parker, Smedley's Hydro, Matlock Bridge; W. J. Humphrey, Oakwood, Outram Road, Addiscombe, Croydon; G. Bonnor, School House, Lesbury, Northumberland; Miss M. Grant, 8 Mary's Place, Edinburgh; A. S. Brothers, 14 Rye Hill Park, Peckham Rye, S.E.; W. W. Howells, 4 The Exchange, Cardiff; F. V. Smith, 99 Hill Street, Garnethill, Glasgow; A. Jackson, Billiard Room, Victoria Hotel, Manchester.

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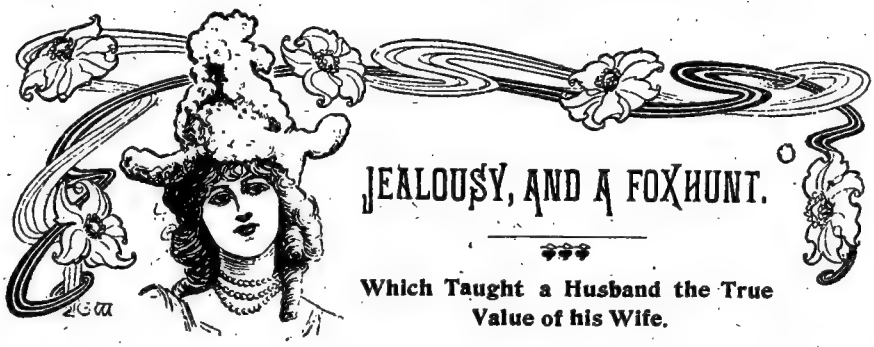

JEALOUSY, AND A FOXHUNT.

Which Taught a Husband the True Value of his Wife.

It was the last week in November—that month, of all others, the very name of which is suggestive of fogs and gloom, but which, nevertheless, occasionally belies its sinister reputation. It was also early morning, and the golden sunlight—marred not by so much as a single fleeting cloudlet—was over all.

It swept with lavish abandon across the broad expanse of softly undulating Sussex countryside, and up and over the aggressive tree-clad hill, near the summit of which stands Wynstay Towers.

Assisted by the gentlest of zephyrs it played a flickering game of hide-and-seek amid the myriad leaves of the ivy-mantle, which threatened soon to entirely envelop that historic pile, and—incidentally—flooded with a warm and shimmering glow the daintily-appointed breakfast-room, wherein were seated Sir Frank and Lady Boyda Wynstay.

Being there it set to work to heighten the effect of the brilliant polish on the gentleman's riding-boots, and to light a hundred thousand little glittering fires amid the massing coils of the lady's fair hair.

All this did the sunshine on this lovely November morn; but, alas, at the threshold of the hearts of these two humans was its triumphant progress stayed. No loophole of entry was there; all within was darkness and gloom.

Sir Frank Wynstay and little Lady Boyda, only daughter of Lord Balberris, of the Hall, Fairlight, had been married just six months, and this was their first quarrel.

On both sides it was the poorest attempt at breakfasting that could be imagined.

The man, shrouded in smoke from his Turkish cigarette, was apparently deeply engrossed in his morning paper. At the expense of his rapidly tiring arms he held it high, and fully opened, that it might serve to shield him from his wife's gaze.

She, in turn, had twisted her chair aside, and was seemingly buried in her correspondence. But, truth to tell, the elaborately scrawled page at which she gazed so steadfastly carried not an atom of meaning to her harassed brain, which was full to bursting of the quarrel of the night before.

That unspeakable woman! How she loathed her!

The sweet grey eyes steeled perceptibly at the recollection of that miserable dinner-party at the Hall. The veiled insolence of her rival—the little lady had been quick to fasten on that word, and still hugged it fiercely—and her husband's open admiration of the newcomer came back to her now with exasperating vividness.

"Ah, my dear Lady Boyda," came again the cool, contemptuous voice of her whom they called Vera Cloytharp, "so delighted to have met you at last. I knew your husband well some years back; in fact, we were the greatest of friends." And the poor young wife saw once again that mocking smile and the slight shrug of those regal shoulders, as the speaker had turned away with a little suggestive sigh.

And Frank—she writhed in her seat as the memory re-asserted itself—Frank had seemed only too anxious to renew this flaunted friendship of former years.

She had listened to their conversation—when they did not speak too low for her to hear—to the covert allusions to what must have been something more than an ordinary flirtation had watched the reciprocal play of their eyes; had even counted the smiles that had passed between them; and the monster, alert and green-eyed, had crept into her heart and made his home there.

Then that long, miserable drive home, during which Frank had seen fit to upbraid her for her "strange behaviour towards one of his oldest and best friends."

How the repetition of the term had stung her beyond endurance, and how she had retorted that she "should not have thought Vera Cloytharp so very old either, but that when a woman took to making up, why——"

And her husband's reply, made with considerable heat, rang again in her ears.

"I happen to know, Boyda, that Vera Cloytharp's complexion is quite her own, and one of the most perfect I have ever seen."

And was it for this that she had exchanged her peaceful life at The Hall, the doting affection of her father, and the undisguised adoration of every living soul about the place? Had she turned her back for ever upon this ideal existence only to discover how wayward even the most ardent of lovers can become—after marriage? Truly, it seemed so, and the hot tears welled up in threatening quantities behind the long silken lashes. Sir Frank, who had been darting furtive glances at his wife from behind the paper he was not reading, rose to his feet at last.

"I'm just going round to Platt's," he said airily, "to look at some beagles he has for sale; but perhaps I had better tell them to get the horses ready before I go. The 'meet' is at eleven, you know."

"Sorry, I can't come with you," she replied in a tone that was a veritable triumph of unconcern, "but, unfortunately, I have a prior engagement."

Sir Frank's face fell, nor could he control himself sufficiently to keep the ring of disappointment out of his next words.

"But, Boyda, think; it's the first of the season—the 'Dad' will be there, and—everybody."

"Then, no doubt you will enjoy yourself," she replied coldly. "I'm very sorry, but it can't be helped." And, gathering up her correspondence with one hand, and her skirt with the other, she swept out of the room without so much as a glance in his direction. In less than a minute, she knew, she would have been crying her heart out on his sleeve.

Some two hours later she caught a distant view of his broad back as he rode slowly down the hill. Once he turned his head, but, although a thrill of intense satisfaction shot through her being, she drew back quickly that he might not see her.

"Poor boy!" she mused; "he seemed dreadfully upset at my refusal. And, after all, why shouldn't I? Heavens! now I think of it, that hateful woman is certain to be there! I can't! I will! I must!" She gave a vicious tug at the bell-rope. "Henrietta, my habit! and tell Sadler to bring 'Gil Blas' round to the front door. Quick! I'm going to the meet."

The distinguished company which had foregathered outside the "White Hart Inn," was already on the move when 'Gil Blas,' with his fair burden, slackened down alongside the animal ridden by Lord Balberris.

"Why, Boyda!" exclaimed that much astonished and still more pleased nobleman. "Frank has been telling us that you were unable to come."

"Oh," she replied, with a light laugh, "I decided that I positively couldn't miss to-day's sport, so, at the last minute, I altered my plans. Quite simple, you see. But how's Daddy? and—oh, *have* you discovered the equal of 'Gil Blas' yet?"

Lord Balberris laughed.

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"In reply to your first question," he said, "Daddy is as cheerful as he is ever likely to be now that a certain scoundrel of the name of Wynstay has stolen the sunshine out of his life."

A lump, big and distressing, rose in the little lady's throat, and the heavily-fringed eyelids fluttered convulsively.

"Poor Daddy!" she said, patting the glossy neck of the splendid animal beneath her; "but about the horse—tell me?"

Lady Boyda's prime object was to divert her father's attention from her tell-tale face, and in this she was immediately successful.

Lord Balberris was an excellent judge of a horse; indeed, it were well within the truth to assert that, in comparison with his very extensive knowledge of things equine, any other acquirements which he may have possessed paled into absolute insignificance. Under these circumstances Boyda's question acted as a stimulant, and the old man launched forth into a glowing eulogy of a mare in his possession, bearing the suggestive cognomen of "Maelstrom."

"There's not an animal within a fifty-mile radius that could hold a candle to her!" he declared proudly, "and I rather think that she could give points and a beating to old Gil Blas here, good horse as he is. A wonderful animal, my dear, wonderful!"

"And where am I to look for this paragon, Daddy?" inquired his daughter, trying to look interested.

"Here, Boyda, here! Miss Cloytharp has her. Splendid girl that. Bet Wynstay a pair of gloves that she would be the first in at the death; and, Gad! I believe she'll do it. By the way, they must have gone forward. I don't see them."

"They? Who?" The sweet mouth hardened visibly.

"Why, your devoted spouse and the lady of whom I spoke. Ah, Jove, here they are!"

"Good morning, Lady Boyda; this is a pleasant surprise."

The black arched brows of the speaker were raised ever so slightly, and the stressed adjective rang discordantly in Lady Boyda's ears. Nevertheless she smiled radiantly, and replied with a laughing commonplace.

Sir Frank stared at his wife in wide-eyed astonishment. Poor deluded man, having lived with one woman for just six months, to imagine that he knew anything about her, or the sex in general. To add to his mystification his wife sent him a swift, bright smile and a nod, both of which she took elaborate care should not be lost upon the superb woman at his side.

"There she is, Boyda," interposed Lord Balberris, pointing. "That's Maelstrom. Isn't she a beauty? Stay for ever, and warranted to jump anything round here, bar the Devil's Leap."

"The Devil's Leap?" echoed Vera Cloytharp loudly. "That sounds interesting. Tell me about it, Sir Frank."

Thus enjoined, Wynstay began:

"The Devil's Leap is a natural fissure, about seventy feet deep, in the rocky soil of a field near Shornden Wood. Its position is a source of some danger to those having no knowledge of the neighbourhood, as the gorse has been allowed to grow around the opening almost hiding it from view."

"And its name," persisted his fair interrogator, "how did it come by it, do you suppose?"

"Ah," replied Wynstay, "I'm afraid I can't tell you that. Possibly," laughing, "it may really have been the scene of some daring exploit by the gentleman in question. Anyhow, certainly no human being, having his full complement of sense, would attempt to cross it, except by means of an improvised bridge."

And so the talk went on, Lady Boyda meanwhile continuing in the blithest of spirits, until Coghurst Wood—the first to be "drawn"—was reached, and the hunt began.

"The Hall" party stood together on a piece of rising ground commanding an extensive view and waited developments. Suddenly the familiar "view halloa" came ringing up to them.

"There he goes!" shouted Sir Frank excitedly. "He's heading Hastings way. Come along!"

The last two words were scarcely out of his mouth when the pack broke cover and went tearing across the open in pursuit of a dark something, which was plainly visible some distance ahead.

"This way!" cried Sir Frank again. "We may be able to head him off!" and in a moment the whole party had whipped up their horses and were following his impetuous lead.

The pace set, however, was, in hunting parlance, a "cracker," and soon the majority of those who had started were left far behind. Vera Cloytharp, riding hard, had drawn up to Sir Frank, and the two went on neck and neck, with Lady Boyda's white, set face not three yards behind.

From out of the chaos of the little lady's whirling brain a single idea had sorted itself. Vera Cloytharp positively should not win her wretched bet. She, Lady Boyda, would prevent her! Yes, even if in the doing the great heart of Gil Blas were broken!

The pace was almost phenomenal, and soon Sir Frank's mount began to hold out signals of distress. He kept his place, however, and presently the two leaders rose simultaneously at a grass bank topped by a wooden fence.

Both cleared well, but Sir Frank's mount, failing to sustain the shock of alighting, collapsed and rolled over. A swift glance in his direction sufficed to assure Lady Boyda that her husband was quite unhurt, and then she brought her hunting-crop down smartly on Gil Blas' steaming flank. The duel had begun!

At the sound of the fall Vera Cloytharp gave a quick look back, and, seeming to divine the other's intention, began to thrash her mount unmercifully. For some seconds there was no perceptible widening or narrowing of the gap between them, but at the end of a minute Lady Boyda saw, with a thrill of elation, that Gil Blas was slowly but surely drawing up to the leader.

Then, suddenly, she experienced a second thrill; but this time it was one of apprehension. Ahead of them, not three furlongs distant, a patch of gorse made a line of sombre green across their path, and Lady Boyda knew—none better—that behind those innocent-looking bushes yawned the Devil's Leap.

For a few brief seconds, as a kaleidoscope picture of the maddening events of the previous evening passed over her mental vision the little lady battled with an insidious prompting. Then it was down under, and she cried out shrilly:

"Bear to the left, in front there! The left, the left!"

But her only answer was a furious backward glance, and Vera Cloytharp's whip fell like a flail. A few more seconds, while the hoofs thundered, and their breath came fast, and then they were almost level. The patch of gorse was not twenty yards away.

"You fool!" screamed Lady Boyda. "Can't you understand? It's the Devil's Leap. Pull that rein. Pull it, I say!" and the little lady made a frantic snatch at Maelstrom's bridle. Seemingly blind with passion, Vera Cloytharp raised her crop and struck her would-be saviour a violent blow in the face.

It was then, in that supreme moment, that the true nobility of Lady Boyda's nature asserted itself. At any cost, she resolved, this mad creature should be stopped. At the sound of the swish which had accompanied the blow Gil Blas had swerved aside; but now, feeling an unusually fierce tug at the right side of his mouth, he swung obediently round, and charged headlong into the flying form of Maelstrom.

There was a thud and a sickening crunch as the animals came together, and then both went down, their riders rolling on the turf amid a whirl of flying hoofs.

With the instinct of self-preservation Vera Cloytharp rolled clear, and scrambled to her feet, dazed but otherwise unhurt. A few yards away a small white face, with a dark and growing stain of crimson upon it, was turned upward to the calm sky.

"My darling! My love! My wife! Speak to me, oh, speak!"

It was the agonised voice of Sir Frank Wynstay, who, having caught and remounted his steed, had followed them, and now pressed passionate kisses on a mouth that was bloodless, unresponsive, and cold.

Afterwards—a matter of hours—it became again as of old; but the time between sufficed to teach Sir Frank Wynstay many things. And among them was this—that in the possession of the heart of her whom he called wife, he was "lord of a mine of wealth untold."

William Scotcher.

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She Felt it More.

Agatha: "Charley is tickled with his new moustache, isn't he?" Marie: "Yes, but" (with a sly blush) "not half so much as I am."

The March of Science.

Ardent Lover: "If you could see my heart, Belinda, you would know how fondly—" Up-to-date Girl (producing camera): "I intended to see it, James. Sit still, please."

His One Failing.

She: "But he has such a delightful way of saying things—quiet a poetic temperament." He (a rival): "Yes, he has soarings after the infinite, and divings after the unfathomable, but he never pays cash!"

A Gentle Hint.

She: "You say you love the very ground I walk on." He: "I swear it." She: "Will you prove it?" He: "Willingly." She: "Well, if you love the ground I walk on, you might run a lawn-mower over it."

Some Satisfaction.

She: "It is of no use, Mr. de Tone; in my present state of mind I would not accept the best man living." He (very coolly): "No; I see you won't; but, at any rate, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that he has offered himself."

Knew She Wanted Something.

Wife: "Come in, dear. Your supper's ready, your slippers are just where you can find them easily, and your pipe and tobacco are on the writing-desk, handy for you." "All right, Molly," groaned the tired, suspicious husband. "You can get that new bonnet to-morrow."

A Fair Deceiver.

Lord Percival Howard: "I am delighted to hear, Miss Bacon, that Chicago prides itself upon its high-toned society—so well-bred and well-read, don't you know?" Miss Bacon (lovely as an eastern dream): "Why, certainly, you just bet your boots we're a cultured crowd out there."

Didn't Want Him in the Family.

Her Father: "You say young Hankisson wants to marry you?" "He does, papa." "Does he know I haven't a penny to give you?" "Yes; he says he wants me for myself alone." "H'm! Has he known you long?" "Oh, yes! Years and years." "Then he's a bigger fool than I want in my family."

Preferred Papa's Cigars.

Miss Mary (innocently): "Here are two kinds of cigars—one papa calls 'his friends' cigars,' the other he calls 'his own cigars,' but I don't know which are the best." Captain Corkscrew (who does know which are the best, carefully selecting one from "papa's" own box): "As it would be almost presumptuous for me to call myself one of your dear papa's friends, Miss Mary, I think that I had better try one of what he so appropriately calls his own cigars."

Cool Wasn't the Word for It.

She: "Tell me, when you were in the Army were you cool in the hour of danger?" He: "Cool? Why I shivered!"

The New Trick.

He: "Nice dog—very. Have you taught it any new tricks since I was here last?" She (sweetly): "Yes; it will fetch your hat if you whistle."

No Making Up Required.

"Come, dear, kiss my cheek and make it up," she said forgivingly. "I'll kiss it," he answered, "but I don't think it wants any more making up!" And he was right.

The Light Went Out.

"I love you dearly, Jack," she said. "You are the light of my life." "I'm sorry," said her father, as he appeared in the doorway, "but I will have to put your light out."

All Policemen are Cousins.

Mrs. Nuwed: "Henry, that new cook of ours is some relation to the one we just discharged." Mr. Nuwed: "Great Cæsar! How do you know?" Mrs. Nuwed: "Well, the policeman on this beat is *her* cousin too."

To Insure Constancy.

Sweet Girl: "I am loved by two men, and I cannot make up my mind which to marry. What would you advise?" Old Lady: "Get both to insure their lives in your favour, and then wait until one of them dies. That will insure the constancy of the other."

He Puts It Down Now.

"George," she said, as she looked up from her paper, "you were always telling me before marriage how much you loved me!" "Yes." "And now you never mention it." "No." "Is it because—because—" "It's because I put it down in the cash book now instead of telling you."

Cure for a Broken Heart.

He: "I understand you have been attending an ambulance class. Can you tell me what is the best thing to do for a broken heart?" She: "Oh, yes. Bind up the broken portion with a gold band, bathe with orange blossom water, and apply plenty of raw rice. Guaranteed to be well in a month."

Ethel Wouldn't Have the Piano.

"I presume, Mr. Brown," said the young man who was about to marry into the family, "that Ethel will take her piano with her when we commence keeping house?" "Indeed she will not," answered his prospective father-in-law; "that piano belongs to her mother." "Thank you, Mr. Brown, thank you!" exclaimed the young man, grasping him by the hand; and the light of great joy shone in his eyes.

Not Very Complimentary!

Sympathetic Plain Friend (to inconsolable young widow): "The last time I met your dear husband he stopped and spoke to me with such a sunny greeting that I was the happier for it all day long." Young Widow (still oblivious to everything except her loss): "Yes, that was just like dear David. There was no woman so humble, or homely or unattractive, or dull, but that he could find something pleasant to say to her, and would take pains to say it."

Quite Unique!

The Salesman: "These goods are imported only in single dress patterns, madam; you purchase this six-yard piece and you may rest assured that no other lady in the land will have a dress like yours. In fact, we could not duplicate it if we wanted to." The Prospective Customer: "It certainly is pretty; but suppose there is not enough in this pattern for a dress for me?" The Salesman (reassuringly): "Oh, don't trouble yourself about that, madam; we will have no trouble in matching it for you."

SERIAL STORY.

THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY.

A Romance of To-day.

By LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Final War," "The Lost Lady Delia," etc.

Mr. Winter Makes an Arrest.

Mr. Winter's indignation on finding that he had arrested a woman was painful. In his astonishment he released his grasp and turned to look at the disappearing vehicle containing the criminal he so ardently longed to lay hands upon.

La Belle Chasseuse, with the vicious instinct of her class, felt that Talbot's pursuit of her lover must be stopped at all costs.

She suddenly produced a revolver and levelled it at him. Fairholme and Edith alone noted her action. At the same instant they rushed towards her, but the girl reached her first.

With a frenzied prayer that she might be in time—for she had been told of this woman's prowess with a pistol—Edith caught hold of her wrist and pulled it violently.

Her grip not only disconcerted Mademoiselle's deadly aim, but also caused her to press the trigger. There was a loud report, a scream, and Edith collapsed on the ground with a severe bullet wound in her left shoulder. Even her cloth jacket was set on fire by the close proximity of the weapon.

It is to be feared that Fairholme flung La Belle Chasseuse from off the quay into the harbour with unnecessary violence. Indeed, the Italian onlookers, not unaccustomed to sanguinary broils, subsequently agreed that this was the finest incident in the spectacle, for the lady was pitched many feet through the air before she struck the water, whence she was rescued with some difficulty.

Careless how or where Mademoiselle ended her flight, the earl dropped on his knees beside Edith and quietly pressed out the flames of the burning cloth with his hands. He burnt himself badly in the act, but of this he was insensible.

Then he bent closer and looked desperately, almost hopelessly, into her face.

"Speak to me, darling!" he moaned in such a low, broken-hearted voice that even Sir Hubert, himself almost mad with grief, realised how the other suffered.

Edith heard him. She opened her eyes, and smiled bravely.

"I don't think it is serious," she murmured. "I was hit high up—somewhere in the shoulder. Don't fret, there's a dear."

Then she fainted.

Not knowing why Fairholme did not join him Talbot raced towards the carriage he had seen approaching.

It was a smart vehicle, with a sleek, well-groomed horse, and he guessed that it must be a private conveyance. Gazing anxiously around, he could not see another carriage anywhere in the vicinity.

There was nothing for it but the method of the brutal Saxon. Explanations would in any event need precious time and might be wasted.

So Talbot jumped into the victoria, hauled the coachman off the box, threw him into the roadway, seized the reins, and climbed into the vacant seat.

Brett, hurrying with the pilot from the Hotel de France, saw a veiled and curious-looking female vehemently urging the driver of a carriage to proceed up the main street of Palermo as fast as his horse could travel.

Even in the turmoil of thought caused by the pilot's intelligence he noted something peculiar in the lady's manner.

Half a minute later he encountered Talbot, driving an empty vehicle and furiously compelling with reins and whip a lazy animal to exert himself.

Brett shouted to him. He might as well have addressed a whirlwind.

"I saw them all together on the yacht when I came away, signor," explained the pilot. "That is, all except the old signor, who was walking with some Turks, a Frenchman, and another who looked like an Englishman."

"The old signor was walking with the Turks?" cried Brett.

"Without doubt. He conversed with them. I thought it strange that he took no notice of those on board the yacht, but just then the steamer——"

"Now," said Brett to himself, "Winter has arrested somebody. Talbot is on the right track!"

Yielding to impulse he stopped suddenly and called a cab.

"Here!" he said to the pilot, "ask the driver if he saw two carriages pass up the Corso just now at a very fast pace? Very well! Tell him to follow them if possible. Jump in with me. I may need your services as interpreter. We must overtake one or both of those carriages!"

The Fight.

Not often have the good people of Palermo seen three cabs pass through the Corso Vittorio Emanuele in such fashion. The sight made loiterers curious, drove policemen frantic, and caused the drivers of other vehicles to pull to one side and piously bless themselves.

Dubois had evidently offered his coachman a lavish bribe for a quick transit through the city, and the Italian was determined to earn it.

But although he had a good start, and his horse was accustomed to negotiating the main thoroughfare at a rapid pace, nevertheless the half-starved animal was not able to maintain a high rate of speed for more than a few minutes.

By the time they reached the Corso Catafini, which carries the chief artery of Palermo out into the country—crossing the railway and passing the magnificent convent of San Francisco de Sale—the horse was labouring heavily notwithstanding the frantic efforts of the cabman.

It was at this point, when mounting the bridge, Dubois knew for certain he was followed.

Three hundred yards behind, he saw Talbot whipping an

equally unwilling, but better-conditioned steed than that which carried his own fortunes. At the distance he could not recognise the Englishman, but instinct told him that this impassioned driver was an enemy.

Brett, of course, was not visible, being far in the rear.

"My friend," said Dubois, standing up in the small carriage and leaning against the driver's seat, "I offered you twenty francs if you crossed the city quickly. I will make it forty for another mile at the same pace. See, I place the money in your pocket."

"It will kill my horse, signorina."

"Possibly. I will buy you another."

The cabman thought that this was a lady of strange manner. There was an odd timbre in her voice, a note of domination, not often associated with the fair sex.

But she had given earnest of her words by a couple of gold pieces, so he murmured a prayer to his favourite saint that the horse might not die until the right moment.

Thus they swirled on, pursued and pursuers, until the villa residences on the outskirts of the town were less in evidence, and fields devoted to the pepper-wort, alternated with groves of olives and limes, formed the prevalent features of the landscape.

Now it became evident that the leading horse could barely stagger another fifty yards, notwithstanding the inhuman efforts of the cabman to make the most of the poor brute's failing energies.

At last the poor brute stumbled and fell, nearly pulling the driver off his perch. It was sad, but he had more than earned his price, for Palermo lay far behind.

"My horse is done for, signorina," cried the cabman. "It is marvellous that he—*Corpo di Baccho!* It is a man!"

Dubois felt that his feminine trappings were no longer a disguise, only a hindrance. He had torn off jacket, skirt, hat, and wig. The frightened cabman saw his fare—changed now into an athletic young man, attired in shirt and trousers, the latter rolled up to his knees—spring from the vehicle and vault over a ditch by the roadside.

Some portion of the discarded clothing lay on the seat of the carriage, but Dubois had thrown the skirt over his arm.

"Here! Come back!" yelled the Italian. "What about payment for my dead horse?"

But Dubois paid little heed to him. He was fumbling with the pocket of the skirt as he ran. Not until he had withdrawn a revolver from its folds—whereupon he at once threw away the garment—did the maddening remembrance come to him that he unloaded the weapon prior to the Customs' examination, and had forgotten to re-insert the cartridges.

They were in the pocket of his serge coat, the coat which Mademoiselle wore. She, like a prudent young woman, had been careful to reload the revolver she carried, and which she transferred to her new attire when, at the last moment, Dubois suggested the exchange of clothing as a final safeguard in the most unexpected event of police interfering with their landing.

Henri Dubois could not afford to expend his breath in useless oaths. But his eyes scintillated with fiery gleams. He, the man who took no chances, who foresaw every pitfall and smiled at the devices of outraged law, to compromise his own safety so foolishly!

For an instant he was tempted to fling the weapon away, but he controlled the impulse.

"As it is," he thought, "this fellow who is pursuing me may not be armed, and I can terrorise him if he comes to close quarters."

Moreover, this superlative scoundrel could feel tightly fastened around his waist a belt containing diamonds worth over a million sterling. Such a waistband was worth fighting for, whilst his pocket-book contained ample funds for all immediate necessities.

If the worst came to the worst he carried a trustworthy clasp knife, and he was an adept in the savate—the system of scientific defence by using hands and feet which finds favour with Parisian "sports."

(*Continued overleaf.*)

HEADACHE

"From my earliest days I suffered from sick headaches, biliousness, and debility," says Mrs. Charnock, Foster Street, Widnes, in course of conversation with a *Widnes Weekly News* reporter. "The attacks came on at regular intervals and lasted three or four days. They were marked by nausea, violent retching, racking pains in the head, dizziness, and utter prostration. I was completely helpless while they lasted, and could not attend to any of my domestic duties. My complexion became pallid, and the neighbours thought I was suffering from consumption. I was frequently under medical advice, but temporary relief only resulted. About three months ago, when my illness was at its worst stage—so that I could not even attend to my baby—I heard of Bile Beans for Biliousness, and I decided to undergo a course. By a little perseverance with the Beans I guarded against any new attack, and never since have I been troubled with my old complaint."

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On the whole, Henri Dubois made for a neighbouring wood in a state of boiling rage at his momentary lapse concerning the revolver, but conscious that he had many a time extricated himself from a worse fix.

A hundred yards in his rear ran Jack Talbot. The Englishman, notwithstanding his recent imprisonment, was in better condition than Dubois. He was a good golf player and cricketer, and although in physique and weight he did not differ much from the Frenchman, his muscles were more firmly knit, and his all-round training in athletic exercise gave him considerable advantage.

Thus they neared the wood, neither man running at his top speed, for both wished to conserve their energies for the approaching struggle. Talbot could have come up with his quarry sooner, were it not for the paramount consideration that he should not be spent with the race at the supreme moment, whilst Dubois only intended to seek the shelter of the trees before he faced his opponent.

The Frenchman did not want witnesses.

Neither was aware that Brett and the Italian pilot had by this time reached the place where the two leading carriages were halted in the roadway. Without wasting a moment the barrister leapt the intervening ditch and followed the runners across the field, whilst behind him, eagerly anxious to see the end of this mysterious chase, came the sailor.

On the edge of the wood Dubois halted and turned full upon his pursuer.

Instantly he recognised Talbot, and for the first time in his career a spasm of fear struck cold upon the Frenchman's heart, for in the young Englishman he recognised the only man who had cause to hate him with an implacable animosity.

But the unscrupulous adventurer quickly recovered his nerve.

"So it is you who follow me so closely," he cried. "Go back, my friend. This time I will not tie you on a bed. You are becoming dangerous. Go back, I tell you!"

And with these words he levelled the revolver at Talbot's breast, for the latter was now within fifty yards of him.

But Jack was animated with the mad elation of a successful chase, and governed by the fierce resolve that his betrayer should not escape him. For an instant he stopped. It was only to pick up a huge stone. Then he ran on again, and, careless whether Dubois fired or not, he flung the missile at him.

The Frenchman barely succeeded in dodging, as it passed unpleasantly close to his head. He instantly understood that here was a man who would not be deterred by idle threats. To attempt to keep him at arm's length by pointing an empty pistol at him would merely court disaster.

So now, with an imprecation of genuine rage, he flung the weapon at Talbot, who, in his turn, was so surprised at the action that he did not get out of the way in time. It struck him fair in the chest and staggered him for a moment, whereupon Dubois ran off again into the interior of the wood.

But Talbot's pause was only a matter of seconds. He did not trouble to pick up another stone. He felt with a species of mad joy that his enemy was unarmed—that he could throttle him with his hands, and wreak upon him that personal and physical vengeance which is dearer to outraged humanity than any wounds inflicted by other means.

Dubois reached a small glade among the trees before he comprehended that his ruthless adversary was still close upon his heels. He stopped for the last time, resolved now to have done with this irritating business, once and for all.

Talbot too halted, about ten yards from him. He felt that he had the Frenchman at his mercy, and there were a few things he wished to say to him before they closed in mortal combat.

"This time, Henri Dubois," he panted, "I am not drugged and strapped helplessly to a bed. You know why I am here. I have followed you to avenge the stigma you inflicted upon my reputation, and at the same time to recover the diamonds which you obtained by subterfuge and murder."

The Frenchman was now quite collected in his manner.

"I murdered no one," he answered. "I could not help the blundering of other people. If I am regretfully compelled to kill you to-day, it is your own fault. I am only acting in self-defence."

"Self defence!" came the quick retort. "Such men as you are a pest upon society. Like any wild beast you will strive to save your miserable life! But, thank Heaven, you must depend upon your claws. Lying and trickery will avail you no further!"

"How can we fight?" demanded the Frenchman calmly.

"Any way you like, you villain. As man to man, if you are able. If not, as dog to dog, for I am going to try to kill you!"

"But you are probably armed, whereas I am defenceless? My revolver, as you saw, was not loaded."

"We are equal in that respect, if in no other," retorted Talbot.

An evil smile lit up the Frenchman's pallid face. He pulled out his knife with a flourish and hissed—

"Then die yourself, you fool!"

He advanced upon Jack with a murderous look in his face. Talbot awaited him, and he, too, smiled.

"You are a liar and a coward to the end!" he cried. "But if you had twenty knives, Henri Dubois, I would kill you!"

At that instant a cold, clear voice rang out among the trees, close behind the two men.

"Halt!" it cried.

Both men involuntarily paused and turned their eyes to learn whence came this strange interruption. Brett quietly came a few paces nearer.

He held a revolver, pointed significantly at Dubois' breast.

"Drop that knife," he said, with an icy determination in tone and manner that sent a cold shiver through his hearers' spine. "Drop it, or, by Heaven, I will shoot you this instant!"

Dubois felt that the game was up. He flung down the knife and tried even then to laugh.

"Of course," he sneered, "as I am cornered on all sides I give in."

Brett still advanced until he reached the spot where the knife lay. He picked it up, and at the same instant lowered the revolver. Then he observed, with the easy indifference of one who remarks upon the weather—

"Now you can fight, monsieur. My young friend here is determined to thrash you, and you richly deserve it. So I will not interfere. But just one word before you begin. Two can play at the game of bluff. This is your own pistol, and is, as you know, unloaded."

Dubois' cry of rage at the trick which had been played upon him was smothered by his effort to close with Talbot, who immediately flung himself upon him with an impetuosity not to be denied.

Luckily for the Englishman he had clutched Dubois before the latter could attempt any of the expedients of the savate. Nevertheless the Frenchman sought to defend himself with the frenzy of desperation.

The fight, while it lasted, was fast and furious.

The two men rolled over and over each other on the ground—one striving to choke the life out of his opponent, the other seeking to rend with teeth and nails.

This combat of catamounts could not last long.

From the writhing convulsive bodies, locked together in a deadly struggle, suddenly there came a sharp snap. The Frenchman's right arm was broken near the wrist.

Then Talbot proceeded to wreak his vengeance upon him. Unquestionably he would have strangled the man had not Brett interfered, for with his left hand he clutched Dubois' throat, whilst with the right he endeavoured to demolish his features. But the barrister, assisted by the Italian pilot—whose after-life was cheered by his ability to relate the details of this Homeric fight—pulled the young man from off his insensible foe.

Talbot regained his feet. Panting with exertion, he glared down at the prostrate form, but Brett, being practical-minded,

(Continued on page 318.)

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Influenza a Cause of Deafness.

Attempts have been made by medical authorities from time to time to associate some particular forms of deafness with Influenza, one aurist in fact going so far as to say that abscesses in the ears are especially likely to occur with this disease. The editor of the "Journal for the Deaf," however, takes up the matter in a statistical form, and points out that, without reference to any special form of ear disease, an average of 28 out of every 1,000 deaf people he has examined attributed the beginning of defective hearing to this cause. The majority of these suffered from dry catarrh of the ear and throat deafness, although some few were affected by running ears. The editor also illustrates the subject by publishing several cases of deafness produced by Influenza which were cured by the Drouet Method of Treatment by external applications. As many of the cured cases were previously pronounced incurable, deaf people will be interested in knowing that a copy of the "Journal for the Deaf" can be obtained free by post by addressing the Secretary, Drouet Institute, 10 Marble Arch, London, W. The "Journal" also contains a Special Report Form, by means of which anyone can obtain free advice. The editor, however, advises patients, whenever possible, to attend the Institute for a personal examination during the consultation hours, week-day mornings 10 to 12, afternoons 2 to 4. For personal consultations a fee of 5s. is charged.

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knelt by the Frenchman's side, tore open his shirt, and unfastened the precious belt. "At last!" he murmured.

Peering into one of the pockets, which by the way of its bulging he thought would contain the "Imperial diamond," he looked up at Talbot with the words:

"Now, Jack, we are even with him."

It was the first time he had addressed Talbot by his familiar and Christian name. The very sound brought back the other man to a conscious state of his surroundings, and in the same instant a great weakness came over him, for the terrible exertions of the past few minutes had utterly exhausted him.

"I cannot even thank you, for I am done up. But I owe it all to you, old man. If it had not been for you we should never have found him."

Brett's grave face wrinkled in a kindly smile.

"I think," he said, "we are even on that score. If you had not followed this rascal he might have escaped us at the finish, and my pride would never have recovered from the shock. However, go and sit down for a minute or two and you will soon pull yourself together again. I wish to goodness we had some brandy. A drop would do you good, and our prostrate friend here would be none the worse for a reviver."

The Italian pilot caught the word "brandy." Being a sailor he was equal to all emergencies. He produced a small flask with a magnificent air.

"Behold!" he declared. "It is the best. It is contraband!"

Brett forced his companion to swallow some of the liquor; then he gently raised Dubois' head and manged to pour a few drops into his mouth.

The Frenchman regained consciousness. Awakening with a start to the realities of existence, he endeavoured to rise, but sank back with a groan, for he had striven to support himself on his broken arm.

"Be good enough to remain quite still, M. Dubois," said Brett soothingly. "You have reached the end of your rope, and we do not even need to tie you."

With the aid of some handkerchiefs and a couple of saplings cut by the Italian he managed roughly to bind up the fractured limb. Then he assisted Dubois to his feet.

"Come," he said, "we are regretfully compelled to bring you back to town, but we will endeavour to make the journey as comfortable as possible for you. In any event, the horses will certainly not travel so fast."

In the roadway they found the carriages where they had left them, whilst three wondering drivers were exchanging opinions as to the mad behaviour of the foreigners.

Brett and the Frenchman entered one vehicle, Talbot and the Italian pilot the other.

"But, gentlemen," moaned the disconsolate cabman, who had headed the procession from Palermo, "who will pay me for my dead horse?"

"I know not," replied Brett. "In any event you had better occupy the vacant seat and drive those two gentlemen to the city, where you can secure the means of bringing back your carriage."

In this guise the party returned to Palermo, evoking much wonderment all the way through the Corso Vittorio Emanuele, whence no fewer than six outraged policemen followed them to the Hotel de France to obtain their names and addresses.

Piecing the Puzzle.

Palermo was in a perfect ferment. Not since the last revolution had people seen such a pitched battle in the streets, for Macpherson and his myrmidons had used no gentle means to pacify Grosjean and the Turks, whilst the crew of the *Belles Sœurs* would not be in a fit state to go to sea for many days.

An excited mob of people surrounded the hotel when Brett and Talbot arrived with their wounded prisoner. Fortunately the Chief of Police came in person to ascertain the cause of all this turmoil, for the first alarmist report that reached his ears made out that a species of international warfare had broken out in the harbour.

He told his subordinates to clear away the crowd, and explanations by Brett and Winter soon demonstrated the wisdom of an official intimation to the Press that the row on the pier was merely the outcome of a quarrel between some intoxicated sailors.

The Chief of the Police politely offered to place detectives at the disposal of the Englishmen for the proper custody of their captive.

Brett thanked him, but declined the proffered assistance, having decided to warn Winter not to interfere.

"The only prisoner of interest," he explained, "received such severe injuries during a struggle which he brought upon himself that he will be quite unable to be moved for several days. His right arm is broken, and his face has been reduced to a pulp. But there is a stout Frenchman named Beaucaire and three Turks who accompanied him, whom I recommend to your safe custody. We bring no charge against them, but it would be as well to keep them under lock and key until we have left Palermo."

"Do you mean the innkeeper Grosjean and the Turks who accompanied him from Messina by train to-day?"

"Yes,"

"You need not trouble about them. They have all been carried to the hospital."

"What!" exclaimed Brett. "How did they come to be injured?"

"I cannot tell you exactly, but they, together with some sailors from the fishing-smack, were knocked senseless by the crew of the steam yacht when the young lady was shot."

"What young lady?" demanded Brett and Talbot together. For this conversation had taken place in the entrance of the hotel, whilst Dubois was being carried to a bedroom by the servants.

"Did you not know?" inquired the official gravely. "The young lady was of your company who stayed here with you—the niece of milord, the elderly gentleman."

"Edith! Shot, did you say!" cried her brother, leaning against the barrister for support.

"Yes, but not seriously, I hope. She has been brought here. The doctors are now with her in her room."

"Who shot her?" demanded Brett savagely.

"The person who was flung into the harbour by the other milord. It is stated that she is a woman, but really at this moment I have not heard all the facts. For she was carried to the hospital with the others."

(To be concluded shortly.)

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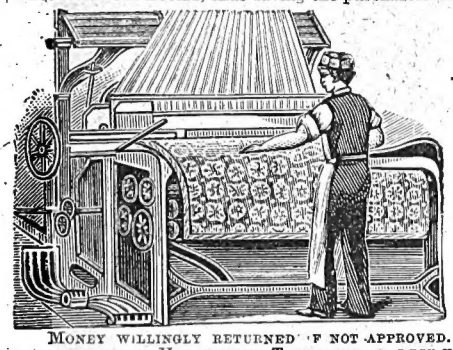

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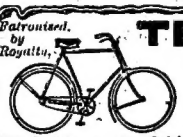

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

To Make Up a Theatre Party.

EDITH will soon be twenty-one, and instead of celebrating her birthday by the usual party, proposes to get up an expedition to a West-End theatre. She writes: "What should I do as to the payment of the tickets, and the part of the house? We are not well off, so shall not have carriages or even cabs. There would be about six or eight of us."

* * * * *

Well, EDITH, I think you had better put the matter in the hands of your brother, or, if you have a male cousin, in his. I suppose you want to be all young people, or some older relative might have arranged the matter.

* * * * *

If you do not know any man who would fix it for you, decide how much each of you will spend on the affair—if you co-operate over it, as you should—and book the seats. The upper circle, which is at most West-End theatres four or five shillings, would be a nice part to go to, though, of course, the pit is almost as good.

* * * * *

As to getting to the theatre without cabs, you had better split up in couples, or threes, and if you cannot all get into the same 'bus or train, just arrange where you wish to meet, and travel separately. Upper circle seats can be booked reserved, but not those in the pit.

* * * * *

I hope your little scheme will be a success. I should recommend for you one of the musical comedies which you no doubt know of, or some other piece of an amusing character. You will not want to shed tears over a drama on your twenty-first birthday.

❦❦❦

Wants to be Popular.

S. W. is a young man who works in an establishment where there are a great many girls. For a long time he has tried being as nice as possible, but as yet has not got on to friendly terms with any of them. "How," he asks "can a young man make himself popular with girls without compromising himself with any particular one?"

* * * * *

By being uniformly agreeable to them all. If you are working in the same establishment, remember that your chief concern with them is business. You can be as agreeable and charming as possible, in business, but beware of making your relations too social. That is where entanglements begin, and one does not know where they may end.

* * * * *

One thing is worth bearing in mind. If a man has not it in him to be popular with a large number of women, it would be better for him not to try. Your own character will reveal itself to others, good or bad, no matter what devices you may employ to disguise it, and women, above all, hate anyone who pretends to be something that he is not.

Is It the Same Girl?

ABOUT six months ago PERPLEXED was introduced to a girl, and received her permission to renew the acquaintance when next they met. They parted, and six months later PERPLEXED saw a young lady who appeared to be very much like the other girl—perhaps it was she. She did not, however, notice him. Would it be ill-mannered for PERPLEXED to speak to this girl, and ask if she is the same as he met six months ago?

* * * * *

I think it cannot be the same girl. You say you have met her several times, but on no occasion has she recognised you. Well, girls are not usually so blind to men's faces as all that. They either recognise a man whom they have met, and give a glance to that effect, or they cut him dead. The girl you speak of has evidently no intention of doing that.

* * * * *

There would be no harm, however, if you really have reason to think she is the same girl, in your politely saluting her—in a gentlemanly manner, which is never mistaken for rudeness—and asking her if she is Miss ———. If she is not, apologise, and take a hurried departure.

* * * * *

If you do this, take care that you do not appear to be casually stopping a girl. As the first girl was agreeable to your resuming the acquaintanceship, there would be no liberty in your saluting her, should you be right in your speculation.

❦❦❦

Boy and Girl Friends.

S. D. has no brothers, but has a boy friend who walks with her very often. He is seventeen, she sixteen, and neither has ever mentioned anything about love affairs. The boy, in fact, says they are "all rot," and says he will never marry. At the same time, he treats S. D. just as a friend. Do I think this is wrong?

* * * * *

No, if your parents have no objection. As you have no brother you have practically no means of getting to know anything about the opposite sex unless you have such friends as you mention. A girl who is ignorant of men often forms altogether wrong impressions, and does foolish things.

* * * * *

Cultivate your boy friend as much as is permissible. But don't believe him when he says love affairs are "all rot." Most boys think that, only some recover from it sooner than others. Personally, though, I have rather more admiration for the boy who recovers later. It shows he is giving his attention to things which are better for him when young.

❦❦❦

Cross Words.

"I was at the theatre with my girl the other night," writes FORSAKEN, "and was not in a very good humour, I made some remarks which I have since regretted, as when next morning I apologised for them, she accepted the apology, but said she did not wish to continue the relationship. I am so miserable, and should like your advice."

* * * * *

It was quite right of you to write your apology, but I should have lost no time in seeing her, and practically making it up. Evidently your remarks showed you to her in an unpleasant light, which she had not before suspected. She thought the matter over, and decided that you were not so attractive as she at first imagined. Try to meet her again. If she has ever really cared for you, her attitude will soon get back to its original state, as I have never known true love affairs upset by a chance word or so.

Cynthia

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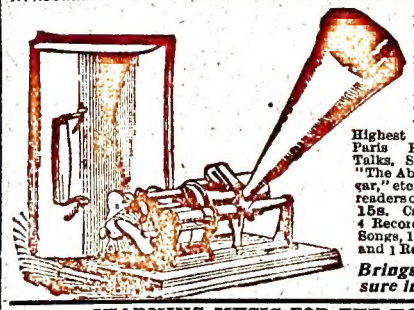

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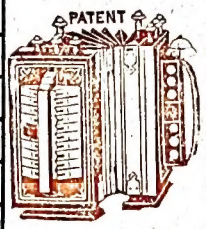

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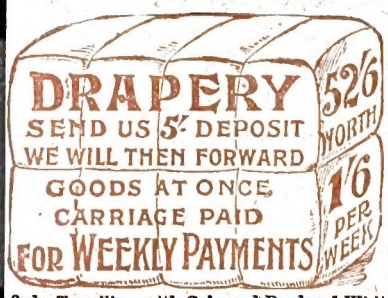

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